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LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
School of Behavioral Health
in conjunction with the
Faculty of Graduate Studies

An Examination of Foster Youth Socialization to Dating and Sexual Behaviors

by

Rhoda L. Smith

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of
the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Social Policy and Social Research

June 2017

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Each person whose signature appears below certifies that this dissertation in his/her opinion is adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

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ABBREVIATIONS

ILP	Independent Living Program
AFCARS	Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System
AIDs	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ASFA	Adoptions and Safe Families Act
CAPTA	Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
CYC	California Youth Connection
FA	Foster Alumni
FP	Foster Parent
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ILS	Independent Living Skills
IRB	Institutional Review Board
IVFPA	Inland Valley Foster Parent Association
LGBTQQ	Lesbian Gay Bi-Sexual Transgender Queer and/or Questioning
NASW	National Association Social Workers
NSCAW	National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
SB	Senate Bill
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
STDs	Sexually Transmitted Diseases

STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
SW	Social Workers
US	United States

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

An Examination of Foster Youth Socialization to Dating and Sexual Behaviors

by

Rhoda Smith

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Social Policy and Social Research
Loma Linda University, June 2017
Dr. Colwick Wilson, Chairperson

Foster youth reportedly face unusual and negative life circumstances and outcomes due to being placed in out-of-home care. Foster care provides a resource for substitute caregiving which can range from archaically institutional to warm and familial. Foster care is a transient system which alters what is normative for youth relative to what mainstream youth experience, especially in adolescence. Being out of control of their lives and futures serves to create vulnerability for foster youth in the area of sexual and reproductive health.

Lack of clarity within the child welfare agency regarding responsibility for imparting necessary, relevant information to foster youth affects their ability to make decisions regarding dating and sexual behavior. Foster youth often make decisions regarding sexual behavior and reproductive health in the absence of adequate, relevant and factual information and/or sound parental advice. This information is needed to facilitate decision making for foster youth which will affect their sexual and reproductive health outcomes. Policies and practices for providing foster youth with information regarding normative developmental behavioral expectations, such as dating and sexual behaviors are unclear or inconsistent.

The current study utilized in-depth interviews to examine how foster youth learn about and are socialized to normative developmental processes such as dating and sexual behavior. This study used purposive samples of social workers, foster alumni and foster parents in Southern California. Literature on socialization around dating and sexual behavior has largely focused on mainstream youth and have rarely used foster youth samples. Multiple aspects of communication create difficulties which may become compounded by the context and culture of foster care. Key informants provided meaningful accounts of socialization within the context of foster care. Eight themes - Vulnerability and Decision Making; Resources and Access; Adolescence: Between Two Worlds; Collaboration, Liability and Risk; Foster Care Experience; Independent Living Programming; Sexual Socialization Practices and Relationship - emerged from the data and highlight the processes of communication which occur to facilitate this aspect of socialization for foster youth. This study found that communication processes for social workers, foster parents and foster alumni were hampered by systemic issues, usually not mandated by policy and occurs mostly in response to unwanted behavior, questions or directives.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As a social worker I have worked with parents to keep their children in their homes and support their safe and stable home environments. I have worked with young people who were on track to reach adulthood in foster care. One of the most troubling issues that I encountered was young people in foster care that were not able to exercise their rights to speak up against and defend themselves against unwanted sexual contact, bullying and/or exploitation. In my observation this was a condition that appeared to last for years following emancipation from foster care. Further, there were a number of minor dependents in foster care that were parenting, like I had been. One of the things I noticed was that dialogue and documentation regarding proactive family planning or circumstances of pregnancy or education to prevent future unplanned pregnancies was non-existent. If it did exist when I was in foster care, no one asked me about having a baby at age 15 or whether I had plans to prevent or to have another one. Although I don't credit Illinois Department of Children and Family Services with my subsequent pregnancy and birth at the age of 19, I wonder whether someone speaking to me about pregnancy, family planning and reproductive health would have made a difference.

Often, issues of child care, transportation, housing and parenting their children encumber young parents and represent barriers for foster youth to completing education, obtaining job skills or becoming employed. This situation invariably diminishes the probability of the young person becoming self-sufficient, thus creating a poverty scenario which increases the chances of the young family coming to the attention of the child

welfare agency and highlighting the recently emancipated youth as a perpetrator of child abuse and neglect.

Meeting the foster family the first day we entered foster care was the least traumatic aspect of my first day in foster care. They greeted us very warmly and seemed excited to have us there. The location of this new home was not far, I later realized, from my family home. If need be, I remember thinking I could find my way home. The concept of home had actually changed, as this was now home, at least for 30 days. The plan was to move my infant daughter and me from this shelter home to a permanent foster home. It was difficult for me to understand the notion that we wouldn't be able to stay here, as there was enough room and everyone certainly seemed to like us. At 16 years of age, I was the oldest child in the foster home and my baby was the youngest. The first day after putting my things away, I was encouraged to connect with friends and arrange to go out and do things 'that teenagers like to do'. I can still recall the temptation to connect with something and someone familiar, but there was also the fear and shame of having to explain that I was living away from my family and all of the reasons why, not that I fully understood them myself. – Rhoda Smith

Policies governing the care and treatment of youth in foster care, especially those in Independent Living Programs (ILP) do not always translate into practice behaviors for agency social workers and foster parents (Constantine, Jerman & Constantine, 2009; Dworsky & DeCoursey, 2009; Love, McIntosh, Rosst & Tertzakian, 2005). This infidelity in the transition from policy to practice often results in inconsistent service provision to foster youth. State and county child welfare agencies are charged with

monitoring implementation of federal mandates through the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS, 2013). One example of an area of Independent Living Program (ILP) services with inconsistent implementation that has the potential to strongly impact foster youth, are the guidelines governing how to advise and orient youth toward positive socialization practices including dating and age appropriate sexual experiences.

A large proportion of children in foster care also come from backgrounds where lack of opportunity and deprivation are commonplace, it is unclear how children from these backgrounds are affected and how experiences of deprivation may translate into inappropriate behavioral transactions to cover basic needs. There is concern that youth under the care and custody of the child welfare system do not receive the support, direction, guidance and socializing experiences needed to develop skills to successfully transition to adulthood. There is a dearth of knowledge about how youth in foster care are socialized to make positive choices about their normative developmental behaviors including dating and sexual behavior. This knowledge and service gap contributes to subsequent poor outcomes for foster youth in the areas of reproductive health and sexual behavior.

Adolescent wellbeing, including emotional maturity and socialization to normative developmental behaviors comprises one of the three pronged outcomes mandated by child welfare policy nation-wide (Courtney et al., 2007; Garland et al., 2001; Goerge et al., 2002; Pecora et al., 2006). Reaching the intended outcomes of this policy is arguably a difficult task. Stakeholders and others working with foster youth feel that there is a lack of clarity on how to accomplish this, as is evidenced by the increased

risk for foster youth and alumni for poor reproductive and sexual health outcomes (Carpenter, Clyman, Davidson & Steiner, 2001; Polit, Morton & White, 1989).

Competing fiscal interests for the limited funds allocated for child welfare services is an important factor that explains why this area of adolescent development remains largely unaddressed by public child welfare agencies (Robertson, 2013). Another possible explanation is the political climate around the sensitive nature of this topic for some conservative policymakers (Polit, White & Morton, 1987; Schalet, 2004). Federal policies such as the Adoptions and Safe Families Act (ASFA) mandate that child welfare agencies provide services to ensure safety, permanency and wellbeing for children and youth which come to their attention (ASFA, 1997).

Social workers face competing mandates for documentation, face-to-face contact with children and families, providing supervision for children in out-of-home placements, court reports, ILP service referrals and other caseload demands. These competing interests undermine best practices for child welfare services and their delivery to intended recipients (Smith & Donovan, 2003). These additional essential duties present significant challenges given caseload demands for child welfare social workers, even for those who are energetic and experienced. The additional tasks associated with addressing the needs of ILP age youth are numerous. Altogether, the fiscal, political and staffing concerns collectively contribute to sexual socialization of foster youth being an overlooked service area (Kriz & Skivenes, 2014).

Numerous studies have noted that multiple placement changes characterize a child's entry and journey through the child welfare system (Hussey & Guo, 2005; James, Landsverk, & Slymen, 2004; Pardeck, 1984; Palmer, 1996; Samuels, 2009; Smith,

Stormshak, Chamberlain & Bridges-Whaley, 2001). These findings highlight the difficulty in facilitating, monitoring, tracking and documenting socialization for youth in foster care. The sexual communication literature suggests the importance of this information being imparted by a parental figure (Adolph, Ramos, Linton & Grimes, 1995; Aspy et al., 2007; Boone & Leftkowitz, 2006; DiIorio, McCarty, Denzmore, & Landis, 2007; Hutchinson, Jemmott, Jemmott, Braverman & Fong, 2003; Hutchinson, 2002; Hutchinson & Cedarbaum, 2011; Khurana & Cooksey, 2012; Kim & Ward, 2007; Ogle, Glasier, & Riley, 2007; Stidham-Hall, Moreau & Trussell, 2012; Swain, Ackerman, & Ackerman, 2006). By virtue of placement in out-of-home care, often with a substitute caregiver or parental surrogate, many foster youth may lack the relationship depth a young person might share with a parental figure. Moreover, the difficulty in maintaining family contact once youth are placed out-of-home has been documented (Hess, 2003, 2014; Nesmith, 2013). Other research associates the trauma of child welfare intervention such as removal, transience, instability, foster homes, as contributing to emotional instability and predisposing youth to risky behaviors and subsequent poor outcomes (Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Raap, 2005). Social workers and substitute care providers, may be unprepared to have discussions regarding normative developmental behaviors, such as dating and sexual activity with foster youth.

Education, also a priority for children in the child welfare system, is somewhat difficult to navigate once a youth enters and becomes transient within the foster care system. As compulsory education is the law of the land for most states in the United States (US), many youth change school multiple times during their tenure in foster care (Gustavsson & MacEachron, 2012). Despite state mandates for school attendance and

child welfare policies that call for attendance in school, many foster youth leave the system having received poor, disjointed or insufficient formal education (Boden, Horwood & Fergusson, 2007). A side effect of the many school changes foster youth experience, sex education and reproductive health classes may allude foster youth due to absenteeism created by placement change. These formalized, school-based classes have been labeled as an important facet of sexual socialization (Brown & Simpson, 2000). These classes may be one of the basic and fundamental sources of information youth receive regarding the physical and emotional changes that occur during adolescence. School instability resulting from multiple placements is compounded by possibly missing out on these important classes, may result in the youth having even less of a chance to develop long-term healthy personal relationships with peers, an important developmental task for any adolescent.

Expectations of youth in foster care regarding dating behavior and sexual activity is unclear within the empirical literature. Most research takes a deficit model approach, which tends to pathologize foster youth (Barth, Wildfire, Green & National Survey of Child and Adolescent Wellbeing (NSCAW) Research Group, 2003). Research studies that have examined sexual behavior of foster youth often focus on potentially adverse outcomes such as teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), human immunodeficiency virus /acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and sexual risk behaviors, including early initiation, multiple partners, ineffective, incorrect and/or non-use of contraceptives (Carpenter et al., 2001; Constantine et al., 2009; Dowdell, Cavanaugh, Burgess & Prentky, 2009; James, Montgomery, Leslie, & Zhang, 2009; Love et al., 2005). Other forms of risky sexual behaviors include sexual acting out such as

inappropriate touching, indecent exposure, foul language and age inappropriate, risqué or revealing attire. One gap in the research for foster youth is research that examines communication around normative developmental behaviors, like dating and sexual behavior while they are in the child welfare system.

For adolescents good communication involving any issue comes from developing relationships between service providers and the child. Thus, it stands to reason that it is critical for foster parents to establish a relationship with the youth before such private issues as dating and sex can be discussed (Love et al., 2005). This is an issue worth exploring from both the foster parent as well as the foster child perspective, as the length of time to establish that level of trust is something that would be difficult to ascertain in most cases. Similarly, poverty is a common thread for many youth in the foster care system (Aron et al., 2010; LaMont, 2014; Loman & Siegel, 2012). Minority groups with disproportionate experiences of poverty are particularly affected. Indeed, African-Americans, comprise the 2nd largest percentage of youth (24%) in the foster care system (AFCARS, 2016) although they only compromise around 13% of the US population overall, according to the United States Census (2016). African American youth are three times as likely to be placed in out-of-home care when they come to the attention of child welfare for substantiated cases of neglect (Carter & Myers, 2008). Thus, it is critical to assure that any inquiry into this issue involves the experiences of youth from backgrounds of poverty and racial diversity.

This study will examine the understanding of policies and practices of social workers, foster care providers and foster alumni around dating and sexual behaviors. Also, this study will explore how youth in foster care are socialized regarding normative,

developmental behaviors. This will include perceptions and directives around gathering information, behavioral expectations, as well as the associated feelings regarding communicating about these issues (Ramrakha et al., 2007). The study will employ qualitative in-depth interviews with practicing social workers, foster care providers and foster care alumni in Southern California. The collection of this additional input will allow for the triangulation of data as well as the ability to conduct member checking, an important qualitative quality assurance tool. It is the aim of this study to add to the limited literature on how foster youth learn about and experience socialization to dating and sexual behavior (Hudson, 2012).

Scope of the Problem

“Being sexually mature in a sexually ambivalent society translates into psychological conflict for many young people” (Rodman, 1990)

According to estimates by Child Trends, a research agency which collects data, conducts research and disseminates findings to policymakers and stakeholders about issues involving children (www.childtrends.org), in 2013 415,000 children lived in foster care nationwide (Child Trends, 2015). This is an increase from the 2012 estimates of 397,000 (Child Trends, 2015). Approximately 160,000 or 42% of children in foster care are between 11-20 years old (AFCARS, 2013). Approximately 69.5% were older than 12 years old. The race/ethnicity of the children in out-of-home care was: 43% White, 24% Black, 21% Hispanic, 2% American Indian/Alaska Native, 1% Asian, less than 1% were classified as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 7% were of more than one race or ethnicity and 2% were listed as unknown or unable to determine (AFCARS, 2015). For

those children living in out-of-home care, approximately half (45%) lived in foster homes with non-relatives. Relatives and kin housed 30%; 14% resided in group homes and institutions. Four percent lived in pre-adoptive homes, 1% lived in supervised independent living placements and 1% were reported as runaway. The remaining 5% lived in other types of facilities. The average amount of time spent in foster care per child was 19 months (AFCARS, 2015). This duration is longer for teens and averages approximately 4 years (Manlove, Welti, McCoy-Roth, Berger & Malm, 2011).

By the time they exit foster care some youth will have lived out-of-home for periods as short as 6 months while others will have stayed in care for more than 5 years. The number of children who exited the foster care system in fiscal year 2015 for the reason of emancipation was 20,789 (AFCARS, 2015). Approximately 68,575 (28%) foster youth will begin their exit or transition from foster care over the next five years (AFCARS, 2015).

Challenges to Studying This Issue

It has been estimated that between 3 and 6 percent of the general population identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (Gates, 2011; Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1991). It should be noted that statistics about foster youth do not include important information about their sexual identity. Indeed, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or questioning (LGBTQ) population in child welfare are largely unidentified (Gallegos et al., 2011). In a study of youth aging out of the child welfare system in three Midwestern states it was found that 23.8% of female respondents and 10.2% of male respondents reported a sexual orientation in a category other than completely

heterosexual (Courtney et al., 2009). While data and research reflect their disproportionality in the child welfare system, overrepresentation among the homeless population of youth, their special needs and experiences are critically important issues to explore (Mallon, Aledort & Ferrera, 2002; US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), 2011), these topics are outside of the scope of this study.

Although the numbers of teens becoming pregnant is on the decline (Child Trends, 2016), according to Shaw et al (2010), the birth rate for teen girls in foster care was significantly higher than teens in the general population. Consistent with these findings, the Midwest Evaluation of Former Foster Youth Functioning, a longitudinal study initiated in Chicago found that teen girls in foster care were three times more likely to become pregnant as a teen and to have two children by the age of 19 (Courtney et al., 2005).

Compiling and reporting the statistics on adolescent health and reproductive outcomes for youth proves to be challenging. This is largely due to the fact that different reporting sources vary around the indicators by age grouping, and use inconsistent ethnic/racial categories. An additional limitation is that agencies use inconsistent data collection and reporting protocols for youth in foster care (Svoboda, Shaw, Barth, & Bright, 2012). Large groupings of ages inadvertently mask the age groups which require targeted intervention. Further, real time statistics for teens that become pregnant while in the care of the child welfare system may be difficult to tease out. Few, if any public child welfare agencies count or track pregnant and parenting youth in foster care (Gotbaum, 2005; Krebs & de Castro, 1995; Love et al., 2005). Summarily, due to the poor tracking of reproductive health outcomes for foster youth and inconsistent data collection, the

number of teens in foster care needing preventive or tertiary services is largely unknown.

Given this inconsistent methodology in reporting, several different sources were consulted to provide an understanding of the problems in the area of reproductive health for youth in general. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that birth rates declined for women aged 15-19 from 2006 to 2014 by 40%. (2016). The teen birth rate was reported as 22.3 births per 1,000 females aged 15–19, falling 8% below the record low set in 2014 (24.2) for females aged 15–17 (Martin, Hamilton, Ostermann, Driscoll & Matthews, 2017). The birth rate for teenagers 15-19 declined to a historic low in 2014 to 24 births per 1,000 representing a notable decline from 2010 (Child Trends, 2016). Information provided by the National Center for Health Statistics reported similar findings, however they grouped the information by gender and for females reported for ages 15-17, 15-19 and 18-19 (Martin et al., 2017). While acknowledging these welcomed declines in teen pregnancy one needs to continue to explore the needs of those still most affected. Furthermore, research studies in the area of teen pregnancy support the notion that a vulnerability is created for sub-populations such as foster youth and note that this is related to not addressing their lack of knowledge around reproductive health, preventing subsequent births, relationships and dating, when they clearly have a need for this information (Constantine et al., 2009; James et al., 2009; Svoboda et al., 2012).

Underlying Research Perspective/Acknowledgments

This study supports the premise of a gap in the child welfare system between the expectation for foster youth for dating and sexual activity and socialization around

normative developmental experiences for these youth (Robertson, 2013; Shtarkshall, Santelli & Hirsch, 2007). This disconnect may be due to the bureaucracy of the child welfare system, such as cumbersome and numerous regulations, multiple tasks and requirements, concerns regarding liability, levels of management and fiscal deficits, or the failure to align agency policy with the values and behavioral expectations of the agency.

Intergenerational effects of poor outcomes for foster youth create a perpetual cycle of child abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, poverty and hopelessness. These conditions keep future generations locked into the cycle of child abuse and neglect. In turn, this cycle serves to increase the demands on the child welfare workforce and resources. Intergenerational cycles of abuse/neglect create a compelling argument for focusing on transitional age youth and newly emancipated emerging adults. Steps must be taken to promote comprehensive socialization of foster youth around dating and sexual behavior. Awareness of foster youth socialization, foster/resource parents perceptions of their role in socializing foster children and how the child welfare system addresses socialization can inform policy, practice, service provision and/or interventions (Courtney & Dworsky, 2010; Robertson, 2013; Svoboda et al., 2012). Understanding the expectations of the child welfare system for foster youth and how they are expressed to frontline social workers and caregivers (foster, relative, kin and group care providers) and foster youth themselves may affect intergenerational patterns within the child welfare system.

The task of teaching youth about dating and normative behaviors involves initiating uncomfortable conversations for many parents. In fact, a website

(www.4parents.org) has been constructed to help parents find the best words and situations to introduce conversation and launch discussions about sexual behavior, dating, risky behavior and expectations for their children. These conversations could be adapted for use with foster youth and be included in foster parent and social worker training. Equally, young people report some discomfort in discussions with parents around dating and sexual behavior (Cornelius, LeGrand, & Jemmott, 2009; Dennis & Wood, 2012; DiIorio, Kelley & Hockenberry-Eaton, 1999; Ogle et al., 2008; O'Sullivan, Meyer-Bahlburg, & Watkin, 2001). There is a marked level of anxiety between biological parents and their children in discussions centered on dating and normative behavior and expectations. This anxiety is likely greater for foster parents and social workers, not only due to natural discomfort in discussing this topic, but also the shorter period of acquaintance and subsequent lack of trust. The matter is further complicated by unknown or unaddressed trauma and experiences which may exist in the backgrounds of foster parents, social workers and foster youth (Horwitz, 2006).

Acknowledgments of the need to have open, informative and didactic discussions with foster youth on the topic of sexuality have been noted (Jerman & Constantine, 2010; Love et al., 2005). Within the past decade, programs have emerged to address questions of development, dating and sexual behaviors in adolescents. Examples of programs which have emerged to address community decay brought on by the high incidence of teen pregnancy, the spread of HIV among youth aged 13 – 25, homelessness, school dropout and juvenile delinquency, particularly among youth in the child welfare system are:

- Power Through Choices - a sexuality education program curriculum designed for youth in out-of-home care (Becker & Barth, 2000).
- Becoming a Responsible Teen (revised) - a group-level, education and skills training intervention designed to reduce risky sexual behaviors and improve safer sex skills among African-American adolescents (Rolleri et al., 2011).
- Making Proud Choices - a safe sex approach to HIV/AIDS and teen pregnancy prevention directed toward empowering inner-city, African American adolescents to use condoms if they choose to have sex (Jemmott, Jemmott & Fong, 1998).

The child welfare system in general and foster care specifically has received poor marks in terms of the outcomes for youth placed in out-of-home care (Ahrens, Richardson & Courtney, 2010; Berzin, 2010; Goerge et al., 2002; McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt & Pilavin, 1996; Pinderhughes, Harden & Guyer, 2007). Outcomes for youth in the child welfare system may improve if social workers and foster parents provide youth with information that can help them to avoid negative outcomes. A focused examination of these processes may illuminate how various aspects of out-of-home care predispose youth to poor outcomes. Addressing these opportunities to improve the future for foster youth are likely to provide greater avenues for successful transitions and sustained positive trajectories for foster alumni. Creating policies that include the views, feelings and attitudes of the consumers (i.e., foster youth and their families) may also prove to have positive and longstanding results on outcomes for foster youth.

The importance of giving voice to, and empowering consumers in the child welfare system cannot be underestimated (Anderson & Lowen, 2010; Robertson, 2013). Simply put, the child welfare system is constructed and charged with the management of

two major tasks: safeguarding children within their homes and removing children from their homes when they cannot be safely maintained in their homes. Poor outcomes are measured in the number of lives affected, as are positive ones. The system is unwieldy as there are many services that need to be coordinated in order for children to be monitored both inside and outside of their homes. The child welfare system has been criticized for placing children into foster homes that do not properly provide for their care or for removing children from unstable families and allowing them to bounce from home to home in search of a suitable placement, which may or may not exist (Mansell, Ota, Erasmus & Marks, 2011). Involving social workers, foster caregivers and foster youth in the examination of policies and practices may prove to positively affect outcomes for families and children. Foster parents, social workers and foster alumni can provide useful and relevant information regarding socialization of foster youth. Anecdotal accounts of success and resilience for youth in suitable and nurturing placements and receiving ILP services may provide insight for interventions that promote positive outcomes.

Proposed Theoretical Lenses for the Study

Looking at the context of foster care, Azjen's theory of planned behavior helps to understand the nature of the quandary that befall foster youth (1980). This theory was derived from an earlier work put forth by Fishbein. As postulated by Fishbein (1960) the theory of reasoned action holds that a person may have an attitude toward a person or thing that guides their intent to behave in a certain way. In this theory, there is an assumption that behavioral intentions are guided by attitude. The theory of planned behavior also takes into account attitudes, intentions, but understands the influence of

social and subjective norms and perceived power. In short, the theory would allow for a lens through which to view sexual communication processes that may take place with foster youth. Applying the theory to the situation of sexual communication with foster youth, it appears that attitudes and beliefs around sexual behavior of foster youth may discourage initiation of these discussions. If either party, the social worker or the foster parents for instance, have attitudes regarding sexual behaviors that clash with those of the youth, those attitudes may result in non-communication around this important issue (Azjen, 1980). The application of this theory to foster care in the context of this study provides a novel perspective in viewing the disparity that exists in reproductive health services and reproductive health outcomes for foster youth.

Study Aims

The focus of the study is to explore behaviors, perceptions and experiences about foster youth socialization experiences while in out-of-home care. As for all youth, sexual activity likely increases with age (Casey Foundation, 1999). Therefore behaviors, attitudes and perceptions of foster youth should be developmentally contextualized. Normative psychosexual behaviors will be compared to the actual reported dating and sexual behaviors of youth in foster care (Satcher, 2001; Welsh, Rostosky & Kawaguchi, 2000), which may be adaptive and/or related to past trauma (Newman & Newman, 2009).

An understanding of the process of socialization and the agency's stated expectation of behaviors is highlighted in policy manuals, supervision and training. Yet we know that perceptions, practice and experiences of social workers, foster parents and foster care alumni are very different than the manualized expectations. Utilizing

qualitative approaches, specifically constructivist methodology, consisting of in-depth, interviews with key informants were conducted to explore the process of socializing foster youth to dating and sexual behavior. Member checking was conducted via email with all study participants. Two of the participants were unable to be reached due to a change of email address or no longer being at the organization the email was attached to.

This study addressed the following aims:

Aim 1 – To understand practices associated with communication regarding dating and sexual behavior for youth in foster care. Aim 1 was completed through the use of in-depth interviews, conducted face-to-face with foster parents, social workers and foster alumni.

- 1) How are foster youth assessed for readiness to receive information taking into account factors such as age, length of stay, gender, family of origin issues and type of abuse?
- 2) How is information about dating and sexual behaviors of foster youth delivered to foster youth, foster care providers and social workers?
- 3) Does agency policy and practice contribute to the transfer of knowledge which takes place between the following: child welfare agency and the social worker; social worker - foster parent, foster parent – foster youth?

Aim 2 – To understand the social worker, foster parent and foster care alumni perceptions of the policies; and to examine the attitudes and behaviors around the transmission of information, education and socialization practices and the nature, mainly comfort level and content, of conversations. Aim 2 was completed through the use of in-depth interviews with social workers, foster caregivers and foster alumni.

- 1) What is the understanding of responsibility for imparting the knowledge regarding dating and sexual behavior to foster youth?
- 2) How are the expectations communicated regarding dating by social workers, foster parents and foster youth?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review highlights the extant literature about foster youth socialization to dating and sexual behaviors. Key concepts of interest for this study include foster youth, child welfare, and sexual socialization. The review begins with a description of the system and its services. It then moves to an overview of the child welfare system, including background, key terms and definitions, levels of involvement (home supervision, foster care, residential and independent living), and racial disproportionality. The next section includes literature on current child welfare (independent living program) policies about dating and sexual activity, and service and communication. The third section focuses on literature about socialization practices, as well as adolescent development (teen dating, sexuality, and sex communication/education). The final section includes a summary of the major gaps in the literature.

What becomes apparent in the examination of the literature is the relationship between socialization, formal education on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and parent/caregiver (from now on) parent-child sexual communication. The main aspects comprising sexual socialization are parent-child sex communication and sex education from a formal source, such as church or school. Peers, media and online sources have also been shown to influence youth dating behavior (Allison et al., 2012; L'Engle et al., 2006). For the purpose of this study the focus will be on parent-child, or parent-adolescent communication and formal sex education.

General Population Research Studies

Samples of a broad age range of adolescents (11–18 years) race/ethnicity, and gender were identified and reviewed. Based on the focus of this study, articles were reviewed which utilized the key concepts of parent-child/adolescent sexual communication in the title or the abstract. Articles were reviewed from several disciplines, including but not limited to health, nursing, psychology, social work as well as international articles on the subject. The literature on parent-child/adolescent sexual communication highlights the timing, frequency, content and conversation style of the parent as well as the parent and child's comfort level with discussing sensitive topics. Again, while there has been a plethora of research around this topic very few studies have utilized foster care samples to explore this issue.

In order to understand the responsibility child welfare (foster care, specifically) holds for socialization of foster youth to normative development and dating behavior, it is necessary to understand the structure and role of child protection. The child welfare system is - *en loco parentis* – Latin, which literally translates ‘to assume the duties and responsibilities of a parent’. Thus the state or county acting as parent is charged with protecting and parenting children once they are removed from their homes. As such, the personification of this system occurs via social workers, child welfare workers, foster parents, court officials, attorneys, child advocates and service providers. These participants play a unique role in the protection of children once the system determines that parents or guardians are unable to provide for the child's best interests. The issue which creates the dilemma is the responsibility the state has in providing care and protection for the child, while simultaneously and artificially ensuring familial and

nurturing care through the use of surrogates, usually relative or kin, foster home or group care providers, characterized as foster care.

Foster Care Definitions and Context

Foster care can include kin, relative and licensed foster home placement for youth who cannot safely remain in their homes. Some states require family or kin homes to be licensed, but the distinction of a licensed foster home in this case is one where the child has no blood ties or previous familiarity (Augsberger, Barbell, & Freundlich, 2005). Foster care is the environmental context in which youth who are placed in out-of-home care reside. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), foster care as an institution is the macro level system. At the mezzo level are the caregivers, social workers and other service providers. At the micro level are foster youth, peers, family of origin and other relatives. The picture of foster care as portrayed by the media/films have showcased unplanned, interrupted and multiple placements, with foster youth residing in the homes of unknown, unsafe or unfamiliar caretakers (e.g. *White Oleander*, Antwone Fisher). These movie portrayals illustrate the potential for further abuse and neglect at the hands of substitute caregivers with cases assigned to uncaring social work and administrative staff. Unfortunately, multiple, unplanned and sudden placement changes are often the case for many adolescents placed in out-of-home care. The reality of foster care is vastly different: most social workers and administrators are committed to providing high quality services and most foster parents report altruistic reasons for taking children into their homes, especially older children (Landsman, 2001; Rodger, Cummings & Leschied, 2006; Wilson, Fryson & Newstone, 2007).

Policy

Children in the care of the foster care system have been noted to leave the system inadequately prepared for life and relationships in the larger society. Poor outcomes for current and former foster youth are often illuminated by their later presence in the juvenile justice system or jail, the mental health system, homeless shelters and welfare offices. Outcomes such as substance abuse and dependence (Austin, Jones, & Annon, 2007; Miller, Benson & Galbraith, 2001) early sexual initiation (Carpenter et al., 2001) and pregnancy (Corcoran, 1999), disrupted education (McMillen & Tucker, 1999) and nonexistent support systems (Ahrens et al., 2010) bear significant fiscal cost on the larger society. Incremental practice adjustments and program creation around ILP and transitional living services have continued to have a positive effect on outcomes for foster youth (Cooksey-Campbell, Folaron, Sullenberger, & Williamson, 2013; Smith, 2014).

A series of enactments have introduced provisions that mandate services through the stated missions and values of the system i.e. Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) and Adoptions and Safe Family Act (AFSA). In defense of the child welfare system, it is a fairly young social work pursuit, approximately 125 years old. As a result of it's recency in the social work sphere, is constantly evolving and improving, and was never designed as a mechanism to rear children (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). Practice innovations are constantly piloted and revised in an effort to improve services to children and families. Evidence-based practices are rapidly replacing "shot in the dark" efforts toward the ultimate goal of improved outcomes for children and youth in foster care.

Few county child welfare agencies have reported on the numbers of pregnant and parenting teens under court supervision in the child welfare system. On September 23,

2013 California Governor Jerry Brown signed Senate Bill (SB) 528 into law in response to this administrative oversight in the California child welfare system. Co-sponsored by the Alliance for Children's Rights, Children's Law Center of California and the John Burton Foundation it is the aim of the legislation to allow the "young parents, foster parents and their children to live with economic security and safety" (SB 528, 2013). The bill has two (2) key parts:

- The California Department of Social Services would be required to collect data on the number of parenting youth in foster care, their ethnicity, placement type, county of origin and length of stay in the foster care system
- Information would be collected about whether the child of the dependent parent has been placed in foster care.

This bill was authored by State Senator Leland Yee in an effort to support teens who might be able to change the trajectory for themselves and their young children by finishing high school, pursuing higher education, abstaining from drugs and incarceration and providing appropriate parenting for their young children. The focus is on preventing them from coming within the care and control of the child welfare system. This legislation also represents a major step toward acknowledging and meeting the needs of an invisible population in the child welfare system.

Socialization

It has been postulated that being reared in one family or another had little bearing on development and behaviors (Scarr, 1992). Baumrind (1993) argues that this hypothesis is inconsistent with socialization patterns, which assert that there is an average

expectable environment within which normal, and deviant development occurs.

Baumrind (1993) goes on to attribute Scarr's misstatements to her failure to specify which kinds of environmental factors constitute a good enough environment.

Additionally, Scarr's misstatements may be linked to the lack of information about the kinds of environmental factors that may be implicated in creating or fostering an environment conducive to thriving instead of just surviving. His argument, in essence represents a viewpoint that when parents believe that they can affect the outcome of a child's development they are more likely to commit to creation of a quality environment. Whereas if they don't believe their efforts will change a child's genetically predetermined outcome and are helpless to change the course of development one way or another for a child, they are less likely to consider environment (Baumrind, 1993). According to Baumrind, "the mere absence of extreme disadvantage is not the equivalent to the presence of a rich and varied environment" (1993, p. 2).

Foster Parent Impact

Accounts by former foster youth who lead successful and productive lives frequently include a foster parent who nurtured, supported, loved, listened and cared. Caring, according to Swick (2007), is an essential element in a foster care environment. Caring, in the communication pattern of a foster child-foster parent breaks down the barriers so that difficult conversations that help the child develop their voice may occur. Swick (2007) postulates that more than anything else these youth require stable, lasting nurturing bonds with caring parents that value and support them.

Parent-Child Communication

The significance of parent–child communication to adolescent development cannot be underestimated. Research regarding communication between parents and youth regarding sexual behavior has been correlated with less risky sexual behavior (DiClemente, Wingood & Crosby, 2001; Dittus et al., 1999; Dutra, Miller & Forehand, 1999; Karofsky, Zeng & Kosorok, 2000; Kotchick, Dorsey, Miller & Forehand, 1999; Leland & Barth, 1993; Miller et al., 2001) increased partner communication (Whittaker, Miller, May & Levin, 1999) increased use of condoms (Miller, Kotchick, Dorsey, Forehand & Ham, 1998b) and delayed sexual debuts for females (Carpenter et al., 2001).

Richardson (2004) conducted a study on parent-child communication by asking middle-school students to write down questions they would like to ask their parents. Teachers posed the question to the students “If you could ask your Mom or Dad any question and know that you would get an honest answer, what question would you ask them?” (Richardson, 2004, p. 89). The students’ curiosity in the area of sexual communication was apparent. The inquiry resulted in 1124 questions, posed anonymously by students, ages 10-15 years. As part of the research design the questions were coded into 18 categories and grouped under seven main headings. In three of the categories, the questions appeared to be of the nature that would fall within the realm of a parent-child discussion of dating and sexual behavior. Based on the results of the study, 69 questions were related to sex and pregnancy, 14 questions were related to puberty and 43 questions were related to dating and relationships. More than 10% of the questions posed by adolescents were related to topics on normative development, dating and sexual behaviors. Another telling result was that of the 1124 questions, 14 students indicated

that they did not have a question to ask as they already felt they could ask their parents anything as they reported freely discussing things they were curious about. This feeling of comfort around communication with their parents from only one percent of students who report an open and honest relationship with their parent is troubling in light of the fact that as students continue to mature, their questions and issues become more difficult (Richardson, 2004).

In a study that examined parent-child communication comparatively between biological, foster and adoptive parents and their children, Rosnati, Iafrate and Scabini (2007) sought to examine gender and generational differences in parent-child communication across family structures. This quantitative study examined the differences in communication patterns as families experienced the transition to adolescence. This study (n=276) highlights the distinctions and difficulties in communication between biological, adoptive and foster family relationships. Rosnati et al (2007), found that for the foster families (n=81) perceptions held by foster parents and foster youth were congruent in that both foster parents and youth reported that the quality of communication between them was poor. This study finding was related to family of origin communication issues attributed to the foster youth. It was also found that the relational aspect of communication may be affected by the adolescent's past experiences of abuse or neglect. The authors refer to the "sense of double belonging" for foster youth, where they posit that because "foster youth have membership in both families, there may be difficulty in managing and finding balance between these interactions during the transition to adolescence" (Rasnati et al., 2007, p. 37). For the foster family, this dilemma creates a situation where the child is physically contained in the home but does not

belong to them. Further, the issue for foster youth lie in their position of being located “at the boundary” within their current status (Rosnati et al., 2007, p. 42). The authors characterize this position as one that is between childhood and adulthood and between the foster family and the family of origin. Findings in this study help illustrate the relative difficulty of communication for foster youth compared to peers during adolescence, especially with sensitive topics like dating and sexual behaviors.

A study by Jerman and Constantine (2010) sought to examine the difficulty in parent-adolescent communication and the association of demographic factors. This quantitative study was conducted using telephone surveys and sampled households with parents (n=907) of children aged 8 – 18 years old in California. The sample was 44% Hispanic and 40% non-Hispanic White. Approximately three-fourths of the parents were female and two-thirds were 40 or older. The sample included 28% preadolescents (8-10 years), 28.1% early adolescents (11-13 years), 28.3% mid-adolescents (14-16 years) and 16% late adolescents (17-18 years). Nine areas of communication difficulties were noted by parents broaching sexuality discussions with their children. In order of greatest level of difficulty, it was noted that approximately 70% of parents reported: 1) embarrassment or discomfort discussing sexual topics; 2) feelings of inadequate knowledge and a lack of self-efficacy to have the discussions; 3) difficulties in managing cultural or social influences or issues; 4) being ill-equipped to recognize family and intergenerational influences and issues; 5) general communication issues; 6) issues related to parental influence or control; 7) difficulty related to accepting the adolescents sexuality; 8) issues with the adolescents’ age or development; and 9) difficulties in discussing specific topics. Some of the difficulties noted were found to be correlated with gender and age

characteristics in that parents reported communication difficulties with opposite sex and older children, but little difficulty with younger children.

One finding by Jerman and Constantine (2010) supports that mothers and fathers found it easier to broach discussions with younger adolescents. Conversely, communication on content with younger adolescents was seen as more difficult due to their age and development (Jerman & Constantine, 2010). This finding is in direct opposition of the finding from the previous study (Rosnati, 2007). While some parents find it easy to feel competent and knowledgeable with younger children, others find that they are not providing complete or accurate information to younger children in their efforts to avoid corrupting the child's innocence. The flip side of this coin was noted in the finding that for older adolescents, parents of both genders experienced a greater sense of embarrassment in sexual discussions when conversations centered around content. This study also found that for the number of topics being discussed, the gender of the parent-child dyad affected the outcome. Thus, when parents and adolescents were of the same gender, a greater number of topics were discussed than when the members of the dyads were of a different gender (Jerman & Constantine, 2010). One illustration of this phenomenon is that the greatest numbers of topics were discussed between mothers and daughters and the least with fathers and daughters. Generally, greater levels of comfort and knowledge reported by parents predicted a greater number of topics discussed. It was also noted in the study findings that the number of topics increased with adolescent's age (Jerman & Constantine, 2010). Two notable findings in relation to the proposed study are that 15% of parents did not discuss any of the six (6) sex education topics with their

adolescent and only 26% of the parents discussed all 6 sex-related topics with their adolescents.

A separate communication issue not highlighted in the Jerman and Constantine (2010) study, is one that emerged in a qualitative study by O'Sullivan et al., (2001). One of the communication difficulties noted was the effect of an antagonistic communication style between mothers and daughters. In this study of African American and Latino mother-daughter dyads, research methodology was constructed to examine communication dynamics of sexual behavior between these ethnic groups, given their disproportionality in the areas of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. The sample used children and younger adolescents and separated them by age groupings of 6-9 and 10-13. The methodology explored the cues and timing of parent-child sex communication, the content of communication and approaches used by mothers to convey information to their daughters. For this review, the results and findings for the older group of 10-13 year olds are reported. Utilizing a convenience sample of mother/daughter dyads (n=72), researchers held focus groups to understand the content and nature of the conversations between the African American and Latino mothers and daughters participating in the study and found noticeable strains in the communication in several sub-groups. They stated that these communication problems may be attributed to the girls' developmental transition. They further reported that strain appeared most often in the age group 10-13 when initial conversations about sex related communication occurred. Mothers noted that some physical and developmental cues served as triggers for the initiation of these conversations. The physical cues were breast and/or hip development, onset of menstruation and girls' increased interest in their appearance and

interactions with boys. Both girls and mothers confirm conversations beginning when they noticed the girls going to greater lengths with their clothing, makeup and jewelry or having conversations secretly with boys on the telephone (O'Sullivan et al., 2007).

The authors noted differences between the African American and Latino mothers in that some of the Latino mothers expressed a desire to have the sexual conversations delegated to a community or family member as they felt that their knowledge and competence may be lacking (O'Sullivan et al., 2001). A commonly reported communication tone for these conversations triggered by physical and behavioral cues was one of danger or warning. Both groups of mothers were forthcoming they had warned daughters that there were negative consequences to sex, and that boys could not be trusted, would look to exploit them or get them pregnant and leave them. Some cited their own personal experiences as a source of information for their understanding and knowledge. Some mothers feared their daughters educational pursuits would be thwarted if they began to connect with opposite sex peers (O'Sullivan et al., 2001).

For daughters in the study, their desire was to have more discussion with their mothers regarding romance and relationships. The study findings indicated a level of mistrust by both mothers and daughters in that mothers did not trust their daughter's understanding of the importance of being forthright with them about involvement with boys. Mothers reported fears that daughters were already sexually active or felt that daughters would be unable to forego sex. Girls did not trust their mothers' motives for having these conversations. Most daughters felt their mothers were using the conversations about sex to gain information regarding their level of sexual experience and involvement, which the girls reported they did not intend to divulge for fear of

retaliation following disclosure (O'Sullivan et al., 2001). These findings illuminate the role that relationship, culture, values and expectations play in discussions around sexual behavior.

The emphasis on culture is largely ignored in the literature on sex communication between parents and children. However, culture has many implications for effective communication and for exploring nuanced behavior, which may serve as barriers to communication. While several studies utilized African American or Hispanic samples to explore these issues, relatively little research exists on Asian cultures around sexual communication. One recent study raised interesting points around the important aspect of culture (Kim & Ward, 2007). In looking at culture, Reid “argues that until a firm understanding of developmental processes is established within cultures, cross-cultural comparisons have the potential to mislead more than they do to inform” (1994). This emphasis on the impact of cultural considerations in these conversations cannot be overstated. Addressing this aspect of communication will be of great significance for foster care populations.

The disproportionate representation of African American youth in the child welfare system is parallel to their disproportionate status in sexual and reproductive health. African American women are 3 times as likely as White women to experience an unintended pregnancy, contract syphilis at 9 times the rate of White women, are diagnosed with HIV at approximately 4 times the rate White women and have more incidences of undiagnosed STDs than Whites (CDC, 2010). While these statistics are alarming, it points to needed interventions for the sub population of African American young women in foster care.

Not only is the age of the adolescent important in order to achieve effective communication; timing of these conversations is critical. Whether these conversations occur with youth before or after they have become sexually active matters. Researchers have examined the timing of the discussions around sexual behaviors and expectations (Beckett et al., 2010). In an early study of adolescents and sexual communication Helpren (1983) highlights the distinctions and differences in communication throughout the range of adolescence. In an attempt to correlate the developmental stage with the level of discussion appropriate for youth, the author characterizes 3 distinct categories for the purpose of sexual communication. He described conversations in terms of a big talk, a tea talk or a social issue discussion. He goes on to describe the content of each of these purposely timed discussions.

Helpren (1983) describes “the big talk” as a discussion that includes facts around biological topics like conception and menstruation that would be appropriate in early adolescence. “Tea talks” were defined as the discussion around family values and the application of these values for family members and friends occurring in adolescence. Lastly, the talk occurring in later adolescence, mainly a social issues discussion, centered on topics such as abortion, unwed parenthood and promiscuous behaviors (Helpren, 1983). It should be noted that while each of these talks focus on content for distinctive age groups their overall presentation is general rather than specific.

This issue of content of discussions being driven by the child’s age has been discussed by several researchers (Blake, Simkin, Ledskey, Perkins & Calabrese, 2001; Boone & Leftkowitz, 2006). Nolin and Peterson (1992) found that it was seen as easier to have factual information in conversations about sexual issues with younger children.

Their mixed method study utilized family triads (n=84) consisting of mother-father-child and measured a construct labeled 'ease of communication' in a study of gender differences. This construct required parents to respond to items around comfort level in discussing sexual information with their child based on 3 different age groupings of children (under 10, 10-13 and high school age). Parents who reported communication difficulty in the study described a loss of control of the conversation and the issue of an expressed need (by the child) for information of a more socio-sexual nature that seemed to emerge as the child aged (Nolin & Peterson, 1992). This communication difficulty supports the notion of younger children being easier to engage in these discussions. Findings revealed that the age of the child was related also related to the frequency of communication (Nolin & Peterson, 1992). The finding that the age of the child was related to the extent of the communication with the child is also consistent with later research (Byers, Sears & Weaver, 2008; Eisenberg, Sieving, Bearinger, Swain & Resnick, 2006).

Researchers conducting studies on parent child communication also found gender differences (DiIorio, et al., 1999; DiIorio et al., 2007). Females appear to be studied more often than men in both parent and child roles. In the sample of studies used for this review, it was noted that most studies utilizing parents predominantly sampled mothers. In terms of the population focus child studied the most often was female. In the literature mothers are identified as the parent most often initiating the sexual communication talks with the child (Dittus et al., 1999). It should be noted that daughters and sons reported conversations about sexuality and dating as occurring more with mothers than with

fathers. Some gender preferences were also noted by male and female adolescents, in that mothers were often the preferred parent to discuss issues of sexuality (Dittus et al., 1999).

When it comes to fathers, however, daughters discussed the value of having a father weigh in about these issues (Stidham-Hall et al., 2012). They stated that they wished that they would have been able to speak to their fathers about sexuality as they felt it was key to learning about and understanding male behavior as well as understanding expectations about relationships, such as understanding men (38%) and suggesting ways to deal with pressure to have sex (24%) (Hutchinson & Cedarbaum, 2011). Of the research studies that included fathers, fathers reported discomfort in discussing sexual topics with their daughters (Berenson, Wu, Breitkopf & Newman, 2006; Hadley et al., 2009; Martino et al., 2008; Nolin & Peterson, 1992). One study found that once fathers learned that their child was sexually active, they made frequent contact with the child to monitor for problems and information. While mothers made more initial contacts around sexual behavior, they also reported discomfort in discussing topics with their adolescent (Ogle et al., 2007). These topics varied by gender and age of the child, with younger adolescents receiving information around biological and development processes and male adolescents receiving more prevention and cautionary information around pregnancy, STIs and HIV (DiIorio et al., 1999).

In a study of African American and Latino mothers and daughters, the daughters were encouraged to take steps to ensure that pregnancy and STIs did not occur (Fasula & Miller, 2006). They were also warned of the possibility of being exploited, derailed from their educational pursuits and abandoned by men. The contrasting double bind noted was that daughters in this study were reportedly also charged to “find a good one to marry.”

The adolescents perceived this type of messaging as alarmist, confusing and lacking in credibility (Fasula & Miller, 2006). This study highlighted the importance of presenting information in a way that is authentic in order to increase its effectiveness.

The salient literature around parent-child communication has attempted to isolate some of the relational, affective features of sexual discussions with adolescents. These issues include relative perceptions of what is being communicated in these discussions, i.e. content, comfort around the discussion of sexual behavior, openness in discussions of sex related topics and responsiveness, which looks at the extent of support for discussions of this nature and encouragement around questions related to sexuality.

Timing issues around the child's sexual experiences is another area of reported difficulty in communication. For adolescents that have become sexually active, sexual communication may relay a different message than the one that the parent is trying to convey. Findings also indicated that when conversations were initiated prior to the adolescent becoming sexually active they served to delay the onset of sexual activity (Blake et al., 2001). For those adolescents who were already sexually active there were mixed results. For some youth in the sample talking about sex increased frequency of sexual intercourse but also resulted in them improving efficacy of condom use (Leland & Barth, 1993). Furthermore, unclear position statements around sexual activity were taken as promoting or providing permission for sexual activity. Several studies (e.g., Carver, Joyner & Udry, 2004; Eaton et al., 2007; Grunbaum et al., 2001) reported the trend that younger adolescents experience a lower frequency of sexual intercourse and less effectiveness and knowledge of birth control and STDs than older adolescents. Older

adolescents tended to be more knowledgeable in terms of using condoms, establishing effective negotiation as well as information regarding pregnancy prevention and STDs.

Perceptions have also been found to be important. Adolescents' perceptions of levels of communication with parents are associated with the abstinence from or initiation of sexual intercourse (Karofsky et al., 2000). The issues of comprehension and sender/receiver intent becomes apparent in studies where both parent and youth are surveyed as to what conversations have taken place. As previously noted by Rosnati (2007) and colleagues foster parents and foster youth reported communication difficulty. Other studies' findings have indicated that the parents and youth report differences in content of sexual communication or the actual occurrence of sexual communication. For many parents who have attempted to have sexual discussions with their adolescents, it is difficult to ascertain what the adolescent perceives when their parents are talking.

Proposed Study

In examining the literature around the socialization of foster youth and their development there was not much previous research to draw from. While there was a sufficient amount of information on sexual communication between parents and their biological children, there were very few studies which explored this issue for foster youth (Constantine et al., 2009; Hudson, 2012; Love et al., 2005).

Studies of parent-child communication revealed dynamics which facilitate disclosure noting trust as an essential element for discussing sexual and dating behaviors. Due to their status as foster youth, there may be historical events, abuse or neglect trauma, or family of origin issues which discourage or prevent a level of trust from

forming between foster youth and their caregivers. In addition, the multiple and complex aspects of parent-child communication and the applicability to foster youth appears to present another hurdle to youth in foster care receiving information about dating and sexual behavior. Many studies with foster youth have explored aspects of behaviors that are characterized as risky. These include early initiation of sexual intercourse, failure to use contraceptives, ineffective or improper use of contraceptives and multiple sexual partners. In studies of parent-child communication very few studies report parents actually knowing the status of their child's sexual experiences. It has been postulated that the difficulty in communication may be due to embarrassment around the topic or the lack of information the parent possesses, however it is unknown whether these or other barriers to these conversations are occurring between foster parents and foster youth. However, literature which examines foster youth socialization to dating and sexual behavior is quite limited and has many gaps. Very few studies have attempted to explore the communication processes of timing or the initiation of these conversations for social workers, caregivers and foster youth.

While the Independent Living Skills (ILS) program curriculum offers information on how to talk about reproductive and biological issues, none of the affective components of relationship intimacy, dating or sexual behaviors are discussed which are essential for the development of the adolescent. This study will begin to examine child welfare practices qualitatively to highlight the communication and processes that occur between social workers, caregivers and foster youth.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses how the study was conducted. It includes a rationale of the methodology and it describes the study sites, sample, data gathering and analysis. The study will employ a qualitative design, using constructivist methodology. Constructivism was found to be the best choice for the current qualitative inquiry to address the varied thoughts, ideas and experiences regarding sexual socialization of foster youth. Constructivism will help to identify some of the service and practice gaps and introduce concepts that will help to identify processes of sexual socialization for foster youth.

One purpose for the study was to obtain the results in a joint construction of the phenomena studied, allowing each perspective sampled in this study to add to this joint agreement. Berger and Luckmann (1966) postulated that social knowledge is relative, varies across people and their social groups and is context dependent. Constructivism will allow for perspectives of various participants involved in the socialization process and facilitate a shared understanding of this phenomenon as it applies to foster care youth. In order to gather an understanding of the multiple perspectives of sexual socialization and its related behaviors, data were obtained utilizing qualitative methods, specifically individual in-depth interviews with social workers, foster parents and foster alumni.

A constructivist approach has as its goal the creation or construction of meaning, which involves “statements about characteristics and presumed relationships in a particular time and context” (Rodwell, 1998, p. 117). Constructivist approaches involve the unique assumptions, data analysis protocol and ethical guidelines which allow participants to disclose information regarding a specified phenomenon in a way that

allows for their perspective to become featured and apparent even in the midst of other perspectives (Morris, 2006; Rodwell, 1998).

One of the premises of constructivism is that multiple realities are solicited to build or construct a shared perception. The optimal constructivist approach seeks “as many realities as possible” for consideration in the sense making of the inquiry” (Rodwell, 1998, p. 28). This study draws on the perspectives of those most visible within foster care and those who might have alternative perspectives or more knowledge regarding the sexual socialization experiences as they pertain to the selected participants.

There are several other aspects of constructivism that make it an appropriate inquiry method for the current study. Within the constructivism methodology there are principles and concepts that support the tenets of research and provide rigor to this method of inquiry. These include triangulation in sampling of relevant groups and maintaining a personal journal and field journals as well as detailed methodological records.

Triangulation allows the researcher and the reader to understand various relevant sources of information that help the researchers come to their conclusions (Creswell, 2014).

Maintaining a field journal alongside semi-structured interviews allows for the repeatability of the research and illuminates the steps taken to conduct the study. A personal journal was used to document the insights, personal feelings and lessons learned regarding a chosen methodology, as well as served to highlight biases and difficulties of the researcher. Auto ethnographic reflection is also included to supplement journal notes and to position the researcher’s insider/outsider stance within the study. As a foster alumnus and social worker the researcher claims membership in both seats during the interviews and has to privilege the participant position.

Reflections associated with those roles as participants are included in the opening and closing of the dissertation. Methodological records refer to the data, codebook and other tools used to draw on the information collected to allow it to be coded and then organized into emerging themes and concepts from the data or data gathering experience. Documentation of methodological changes (i.e. follow up on questions that arose, but were not part of the original inquiry) were recorded in accordance with ethical and verifiable research practice.

The constructivist approach in employing these materials (personal journal, field journal and other methodological records) and this method of recording responses allow for the creation of an audit trail and gives the study warranted assertibility. Warranted assertibility means that the study has “the safeguards and reviews to suggest that the findings are reasonable, given the assumptions, the processes and the context of the inquiry” (Rodwell, 1998, p. 193). The concept and quality of fairness throughout the study speaks to the ethical treatment of human subjects in a research project and special considerations to be applied for in the use of constructivist methodology. This would include the use of fully informed consent, prolonged engagement, and peer debriefing.

Giving validity to the study and operating in a way that controls for these principles is carried out via the use of a reflexive journal, methodological log and field journals. Rodwell (1998) describes the use of the reflexive journal as recordings made by the researcher of tacit knowledge and a way to track the researcher’s journey through the constructivism project. The methodological log, she reports, should be utilized to “record research questions, purposive sampling elements, serial selection, analytic decisions, coding mechanisms, decision rules, category labels and tentative ideas about the

relationship between categories” (Rodwell, 1998, p. 136). The use of this journal is also a valuable tool for keeping accounts of high and low points (i.e. where the study made progress and where it appears to get stuck) for the research and the researcher. Utilizing these tools to track and monitor the data collection through face-to-face interviews and follow up member checking helped to effectively facilitate the process of the joint construction (Creswell, 2014).

Constructivism also utilizes the concepts of authenticity and fairness to review and measure the tasks of data collection and analysis against the integrity and quality of the process and the researcher (Rodwell, 1998). Guba and Lincoln (2005) and Rodwell (1998) highlight 5 types of authenticity. These are fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity. These concepts refer to the ability to consider participants in every facet of human subject protections (fairness), increase awareness of other’s perspectives (ontological) and increase understanding of the area of inquiry (educative). They further allow the researcher to conduct the study in a way that stimulates the participants within their emergent understanding (catalytic) and determine whether there will be any action subsequent to the inquiry by the participants and/or as a result of the new understanding (tactical) (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Rodwell, 1998).

Sample

For this study it was determined that to gather data on the nature of the lived experience and accurately capture the true experience of sexual socialization practices, a purposive sample would be used. Within the context of foster care, three separate groups:

foster alumni, social workers and foster parents were key to obtaining firsthand knowledge regarding the actual experiences of sexual socialization. The study sample comprised of foster care alumni, foster and kin parents and social workers working with transition age foster youth. Participants for this research were selected in accordance with theoretical sampling guidelines. The sample in constructivist research is derived from the context of the inquiry. In this study, the context is foster or out-of-home care. In this sampling approach, the researcher looks for study participants who will “give the most complete data about the study focus” (Morris, p. 91, 2006). Foster parents, foster youth and social workers are rarely provided with opportunities to speak regarding their experiences. This research may shed some light on and validate those experiences and add to existing knowledge of socialization of foster youth and their dating and sexual behaviors.

The following is a more detailed description for each group that was recruited:

1. Foster care alumni: Adults who have been prior recipients of foster care or out-of-home care services;
2. Foster and kin parents: Traditional non-relative foster parents, as well as extended family members providing or who have provided care to foster youth. The non-relative groups excluded staff in group or congregate care, or persons providing direct services to the foster youth;
3. Child welfare social workers, case managers: Persons that work for public/private agencies and whose primary responsibilities include monitoring the care and treatment of youth placed in out-of-home care.

These are 3 representative groups who are considered to be legitimate stakeholders of knowledge regarding the sexual socialization of foster youth and as such are considered, in the constructivist tradition, to be members of the hermeneutic circle (Rodwell, 1998). A hermeneutic circle is composed of members who share ideas regarding the area of inquiry. According to Rodwell (1998), this “circular conversation between interested parties is where perspectives and insights are shared, tested and evaluated” (p. 256). This exchange among the chosen stakeholders has been referred to as the hermeneutic dialectic, as it seeks out individual interpretations which when compared and contrasted may change during the process (Morris, 2006). An example of this can be seen in the diagram below.

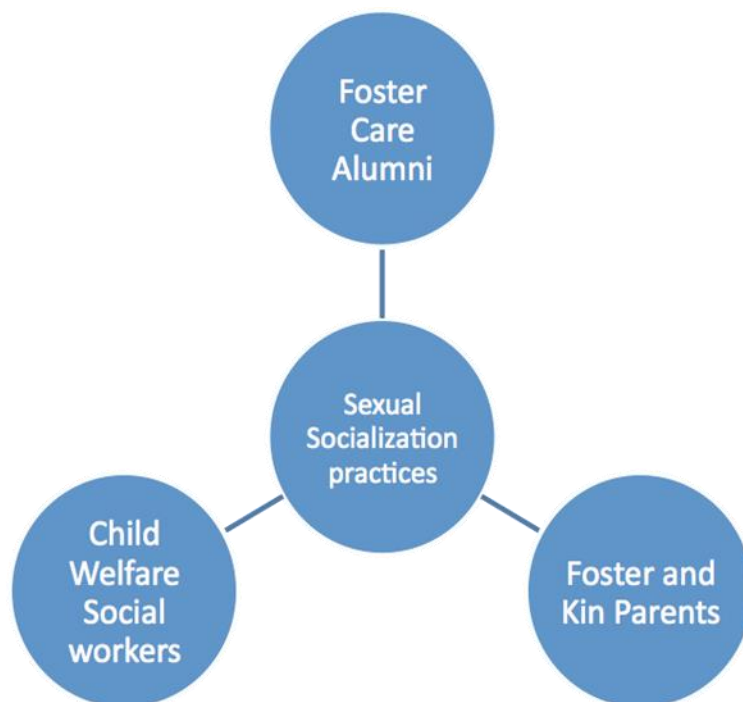


Figure 1. Diagram of Selected Members of the Hermeneutic Circle

The diagram above illustrates the equal sharing and contribution of the perspectives of participants in the construction of the phenomena, which in this case is sexual socialization of foster youth. A complete rendering of the hermeneutic circle would list others who might be able to weigh in on and contribute to a construction of the socialization of foster youth to dating and sexual behavior. These would include, for example, public health nurses, teachers, siblings and parents of foster youth. Medical doctors, attorneys, and the circle could be expanded until anyone who might have an idea of the phenomenon of socialization was listed. This study utilized adults formerly in foster care and within the past 5 years, exited from out-of-home care to represent the foster youth perspective. These participants were referred to as foster care alumni, as their previous tenure in foster care qualifies them to represent that population. Those participants who previously or are currently providing residential services to foster youth are foster and kin parents. This sample contained professionally trained foster parents, relative caregivers and other adults known to foster youth and their families (kin). These caregivers varied, as some were currently providing care for a child, others had previously provided care. One distinction regarding the heterogeneity in this group of participants is that not all of these caregivers received formal foster parent training when they began providing care. Those participants who are responsible for managing the cases of foster youth while they are placed out of the home and who are responsible for monitoring their care while in those placements will be referred to as child welfare social workers. This group was comprised of a wide variety of formally educated and regularly trained professional employees who are commonly classified and are responsible to act as social workers.

In order to gain the maximum variation in individual constructions an incentivized systematic snowball recruitment strategy was utilized (Morris, 2006). In this strategy participants were asked to refer other participants like themselves who have a point of view on this issue. The size of the sample was determined by the availability of participants as well as the redundancy reached in repeated interviews. This repeat of responses and point in the inquiries where no new information is collected is referred to as saturation. This concept as postulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2006) indicate that when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation the data have become saturated. In this study representatives from each participant group were recruited, for a total of 29 individual interview participants. Saturation was reached on both the planned interview questions and newly arising issues critical to the inquiry. Recruitment could have continued for further exploration of related issues, however, it was felt that saturation was achieved. It is unknown how many participants would be needed to achieve saturation on the related topics and participants from each group were solicited as was limited by the study period and duration. All participants were screened utilizing specific criteria for each group:

- Foster care alumni (FA) – Adult males and females who had been in at least 2 foster care placements since the age of 14 and exited foster care within the past 5 years, and who were determined to be at least 19 years old.
- Foster and kin parents (FP) - licensed or non-licensed adults who had provided care to a foster youth age 14 or older and who had a minimum of 2 years of experience providing care to adolescents in foster care were included.

- Child welfare social workers (SW) – adults employed by a public or private child welfare agency who have a minimum of 2 years providing case management services to youth age 14 years or older placed in out-of-home care.

These criteria for inclusion were selected as they were determined to best capture information around similar experiences of foster care and sexual socialization. Each group of participants is in a unique position to provide perspective on the phenomena of sexual socialization within the context of the foster care system. These participants have provided direct care and/or case management of foster youth or received services during the time when adolescents are concerned with physical and physiological changes and are preoccupied with being accepted by peers of both sexes.

Interview Process

Participants were interviewed in various locations throughout Riverside, San Diego, Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties. Social workers were interviewed in county field offices. Foster and kin parents and foster care alumni were interviewed at mutually agreed upon locations that were convenient to them and which allowed for sufficient privacy. These included library study rooms, participant homes, empty agency offices, county office breakrooms and the researcher's car. Interviews were conducted in private settings using a semi-structured discussion guides (see Appendices P, Q, & R). All interviews were audio taped with participant consent. All participants consented and signed a statement of informed consent (see Appendices F, G, & H). Participants also signed in at the time of interview and verified that they received a gift card prior to beginning the interview or completing a demographic survey (see Appendices I, J, & K).

All interviews were completed and none of the interviews ended prior to all questions being addressed by the participants. Notes regarding interviews were completed immediately after the interview to optimize accurate recall (see sample reflexive note Appendix X). All audiotapes were be transcribed by an outside transcription agency. Transcripts were entered in the computer and using NVivo qualitative data analysis (QDA) software, coded for content pertinent to the topic under study and analyzed by the researcher.

Codebook Development and Coding Process

After the interviews were conducted a grounded theory approach of line-by-line coding to identify emergent codes in transcripts (ideally one from each perspective) was completed. Second-line coding to organize the codes into categories that encompass similar information followed. The codebook was developed by the researcher (Boyatzis, 1998). NVivo refers to initial codes as nodes, which are used as containers for the data. The data from this study resulted in 228 initial nodes, which resulted from the 29 transcripts generated from the audiotaped interviews. The data sources broke down as follows: foster care alumni (n=10), child welfare social workers (n=12) and foster parents (n=7). The process of data reduction included combining and reorganizing like or associated codes. One example of this reduction of data from nodes (codes) into categories went as follows: Initial codes were labeled adolescence, contemporary adolescence, age considerations, appropriate curiosity, developmental maturity and puberty. After reduction, only categories, Adolescence and Puberty were retained. The final theme was called Adolescence: Between Two Worlds, which denoted the dynamic

and suspended aspects which were highlighted in the data. Applying this data reduction strategy to all 228 codes, resulted in 15 categories that became the final 8 themes in an effort to organize the data into manageable blocks of data, which best represented the information provided by participants. The final codebook applies to all codes and themes which emerged and helped to describe and organize the data into meaningful, representative categories, from which the themes developed.

Validity/Reliability/Rigor

Member Checking

According to Simon, (1994) “all voices should be heard in the way the meaning has been constructed” (p. 164). If this has occurred, the graphic and short explanations should make sense and participants should be able to see themselves in the final presentation of the results. Once the data was reduced into themes within and across the target groups, categories, codes and themes were shared with representatives from each of the 3 participant groups. Participants from each group were emailed a list of themes and queried as to whether they felt these codes were accurately grouped to provide representation of their interview data.

Member checking was completed via email and lasted for a period of 1 month. Some adjustments were made based on feedback received, Feedback on themes, or member checking was received from 1 participant for the 3 groups. That participant indicated that they felt the concepts were correctly categorized under the appropriate themes. These participants serve the purpose of checking the data; a collective understanding to determine whether the findings make sense to those most involved or lands close to the

issue under investigation. An additional goal of the member checking is to ensure that the themes represent the participant group responses and to make adjustment to those constructions, if necessary.

Study Area

The geographic areas chosen for the study initially was Southern California, with most interviews in or around Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. San Bernardino County is the largest geographical county in the United States (excluding Alaska), and will be the primary site for the study. The county is geographically diverse in both its terrain and living communities. There are numerous rural areas and multiple urban areas that include impoverished, middle -and upper class neighborhoods and communities. Notwithstanding the sprawling landmass, it is a county with several racial and ethnic groups including a sizable tribal community and Indian reservations. The tribes represented in San Bernardino County include Yuma, Serrano, Cahuilla, Chimehuera and Pahute. These tribes are affiliated under the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians located near Highland, California. San Bernardino also is home to ski and mountain living and resort communities.

In San Bernardino County there were 4,368 children in out-of-home care as of June, 2013. Approximately 32% of the children in placement were ages 13 to 19 and older (San Bernardino County Annual Report, 2013).

Riverside County is a similarly situated neighboring county in Southern California and will be the additional site for the study. Riverside County consists of a combination of urban and rural areas. Riverside County is comprised of 28 cities and is home to 12

federally recognized Native American Indian tribes. As the 4th largest geographic county it is also the 4th largest in terms of its population. The tribes in Riverside County are Aqua Caliente, Augustine, Cabazon, Cahuilla, Colorado River, Morongo, Pechanga, Ramona Village, Santa Rosa, Soboba Band of Mission Indians, Torres-Martinez and Twenty-Nine Palms. Additionally, the county also includes some military base populations. It is home to several resort communities and the Cleveland and Joshua Tree national forests.

In Riverside County 54.7 of every 1000 children make up some portion of the child welfare system. On average about 47 of every 1000 youth in the child welfare system is between the ages of 11 – 20. The population of 0 - 17 year olds account for 29% of the residents of Riverside County. The median household income is \$58,000. As of April 2013, there were 1691 children between the ages of 11-20 living in foster care supervised by Riverside County.

As a result of the difficulty recruitment posed and as a result of snowball sampling, participants were recruited from several sites throughout Southern California. The final study included participants from San Diego, San Bernardino, Riverside and Los Angeles counties.

Recruitment

Social worker recruitment was facilitated through telephone and mail contact to 2 large nearby neighboring counties child welfare agencies (Appendix T). A response was granted and a subsequent meeting scheduled. During this meeting inquiries were made as to the purpose, goals and levels of inquiry which the study would entail. Subsequent to

the meeting, documents utilized in the study, informed consent, questionnaire and discussion questions for social workers were examined and suggestions offered. All changes were agreed to by the researcher and a letter of support was provided. Permission and access to county social workers was given by executive management of the responding county. The study commenced in July, 2016 and social workers were interviewed at 2 local field offices. Two requests were made and granted: a summary of study findings be presented to executive management and that social workers not be given \$25 gift cards in exchange for participating in the study. An agreement was reached that a \$5 Starbucks would be more appropriate for interviews conducted at the county site and during work hours.

Several foster parent and foster youth groups within the study area were identified for recruiting members. Two foster parent/kin groups and two foster care alumni groups were contacted as an initial resource to recruit participants. For the foster parent/kin groups, initial contact was made via telephone, email and in-person with Inland Valley Foster Parent Association (IVFPA) of San Bernardino, California Chapter 64 (see Appendix E). IVFPA is an association of foster caregivers “committed to supporting and helping the children [we] care for and the families who have opened their hearts and homes to these children” (inlandvalleyfosterparentassociation.org). Contact was made with the Westside Kinship Support Services of San Bernardino County by telephone. Westside Kinship Support Services “helps strengthen families of individuals who are raising children of their extended family by providing them with information, community resources, education and other services related to their needs”

(www.westsidechristiancenter.net). These contacts did not yield any participants to the study.

For the recruitment of foster care alumni, contact was made with California Youth Connection (CYC). CYC was “founded in 1988 and serves more than 500 foster and transitioning youth (ages 14-24) annually through 33 chapters.” CYC is the only organization in California to “engage foster youth in the policy making process and is now a national model.” Contact with this group did not result in any foster alumni participating in the study. Contact was made with several foster youth and foster care alumni groups through Facebook, email and telephone calls (see Appendix D). This contact resulted in recruitment of a few foster alumni which were not interviewed as they did not meet criteria to be interviewed in person, as they were not located in Southern California.

Social worker participants were instrumental in referring foster alumni to the research study. Social workers who were unable to participate in the study referred foster alumni and foster caregivers to the research study. The benefit of making contact with several Facebook foster alumni groups was that it highlighted a limitation of the study which was that the IRB was written in a way that limited recruitment of participants to a specific geographic area. This resource did serve, however, to highlight accessibility for recruiting larger groups of foster alumni for future studies as well as helped to familiarize the researcher with the structure, access to and function of these online groups. The introduction of the researcher to this group also aided in posting recruitment flyers in agencies, distributing flyers to agencies and informing possible participants to the research study.

Numerous telephone calls and emails were sent as attempts to arrange focus group meetings for foster parents and foster alumni. Given that the researcher was relocated for a fellowship to Northampton, MA in September 2016, coordination of these groups proved extremely challenging. The dissertation committee was contacted as to the recruitment issues. Consensus was reached that the study would continue without including focus groups for social workers, foster alumni and foster caregivers.

Upon making contacts with representatives from the foster parent and alumni participants group, an introduction and a brief synopsis of the study was given. A disclosure of researcher status as a doctoral candidate at Loma Linda University was given. Permission was granted and the researcher was able to attend a monthly meeting for one foster parent group and a required training class for another foster parent group. One foster parent from the training class was found to be eligible, expressed an interest and completed the study. The researcher was invited to 2 other group meetings for foster caregivers and foster alumni, but those meetings were subsequently cancelled for low attendance or lack of interest in participating in a focus group. The researcher then followed up with an email to recap the telephone conversation, thank the contact persons of the agencies and to request that if other possible participants inquired regarding the study that the researcher's contact information be provided to them.

Data Gathering

This methodology calls for prolonged engagement with the participants in the data gathering process. Initially, focus groups for each of the participant groups were planned to inform the individual interview questions. Foster parents were contacted using a

variety of methods, i.e. email, telephone and in person. These included the initial telephone call, contact at the monthly foster parent association meeting, a telephone screening interview with interested participants and face-to-face interviews. Efforts to recruit and attempts to arrange participants for the focus group proved to be unsuccessful at this time. Therefore, the study design was modified and does not include focus group data or information. Prolonged engagement is helpful for “diluting the distortions introduced by the presence of an outsider and facilitates trust” in the researcher so that participants will communicate in an honest and authentic manner (Rodwell, 1998, p. 98). The resultant effects of prolonged engagement were that a level of comfort and trust was reached which facilitated the emergence of authentic communication and decreased the effect of response bias. Establishing trust through prolonged engagement proved to be a positive factor in getting participants to identify and refer others they felt would have an opinion, participate in the study and be interested in the area of inquiry (Morris, 2006; Sellers, Wilson & Harris, 2015).

Reminders regarding the purpose of the study and the importance of unheard voices being represented through the study was reiterated to the participants. Participants were informed and reminded regarding the risks, benefits, voluntary nature of the study and their right to terminate participation and withdraw from the study and/or have their data excluded without loss of benefit or status at the onset of each meeting. This was accomplished by the researcher providing participants with a copy of the informed consent while the researcher read the informed consent aloud, followed by asking participants for their understanding prior to their signing the informed consent document. In addition, the researcher carefully discussed issues of confidentiality with all

participants. Measures were taken to protect participants as the nature of the study may well have proved sensitive for some participants (Morris, 2006; Renold, Holland, Ross & Hillman, 2008; Rodwell, 1998) (see Appendices F, G and H for informed consent forms).

Brief Demographic Survey

To more fully contextualize the sample, each participant was asked, before their one-on-one interviews to complete a brief demographic survey, which comprises questions regarding gender, age, ethnic origin, experience and opinions about comfort level related to socialization practices and discussions. Prior to completing this document, participants were asked to select and receive their choice of a \$25 gift card and to sign a receipt for the gift card (see Appendices I, J & K). The only exception to this procedure occurred with the social worker interviews. While the identical steps were completed with social workers, workers interviewed during work hours were only offered a \$5 Starbucks gift card, as per the agreement with County management (see Appendix I).

Individual Interviews

Based on the questions of interest in this study, a conversation/interview guide was developed (Appendices O, P & Q) and used to guide the initial interviews (Morris, 2006; Rodwell, 1998). The conversation guide was modified as the interviews warranted for the current and future interviews. ‘Pumps’ as suggested by Rodwell (1998) were used to solicit more information utilizing such statements as ‘tell me more about...’ and asking for examples. Once information becomes non-productive or redundant, or the participant requests that the interview end, or begins to appear otherwise disinterested, distressed or

fatigued; the interview will terminate (Rodwell, 1998). Prior to completing the individual interview, participants were given a flyer with information for local agencies for follow up, low- or no cost counseling should they deem counseling necessary in the future (see Appendix R). At this time, the participants were queried regarding others who may want to participate or to identify and refer others who may be interested in participating. Referrals were screened to ensure they met inclusion criteria. A flyer and a business card for the researcher were provided for the participants to pass on to other prospective participants they may want to refer.

Referrals were sought from all participants, (i.e. foster parents, social workers, foster alumni) who might have similar or different opinions than theirs regarding the topic of sexual socialization of foster youth after the close of the interview (Morris, 2006). All interviews were audiotaped and employed the use of a conversation (discussion) guide. Interviews began from a perspective of the blank page approach proposed in Morris (2006). Questions from the conversation guide were utilized encompassing a pool of questions as suggested by Patton (2002). These questions would take the form of “Experience / Behavior, Opinion / Value, Feeling, Knowledge, Sensory and Background/Demographic questions” (p. 213). Questions such as ‘How many years did you spend in foster care? In your opinion should foster youth be allowed to date? Who do you believe should counsel youth regarding dating?’ Background/demographic questions were administered to all participants at the in-person interviews after they signed the informed consent forms and received their gift card incentive. Following each individual interview the data were transcribed within 7-10 days to increase accuracy of

the participant's account as it will be in recent proximity to the actual interview and contact by the researcher. Line by line method of coding was employed (Charmaz, 2006).

Qualitative Analysis

For constructivism, “this [constant comparison] is a means of processing data, not deriving theory for prediction and explanation” (Rodwell, 1998, p. 155). Line by line coding as described by Charmaz (2006) was employed. The data were broken into units and then like units are lumped into a pile and upon coming into a different unit, beginning another pile until all of the units are grouped. As suggested by Rodwell (1998), any units which were not similar were placed in a group called miscellaneous until an appropriate category is formed.

Data collection, and data analysis are interwoven and ongoing throughout the study. Following each of the interviews, the audio recorded data were transcribed and immediately downloaded into NVivo software. Once this was done, the data were broken into units and sorted and lumped together to begin initial coding. After the initial coding was completed each unit was reviewed to undergo the process of open, first line coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Codes were established for the purpose of categorizing data. Once a set of codes was identified into groupings, also referred to as second line coding, these codes resulted in the development of a final codebook that applies to all transcripts. Lumping consists of putting units with similar content together. This final set of themes comprises the codebook and was organized to connect back to the research questions of interest identified for the study (Boyatzis, 1998). Rodwell (1998) notes, “it is important to remove irrelevant ‘noise’ in the data such as ums and ahs and all tangential

information” (p. 155). This guideline was completed by requesting that the transcription agency screen for irrelevant sounds which were to be deleted from the transcripts, otherwise all transcripts were delivered verbatim.

Data analysis consisted of reviewing and lumping coded sections of text or nodes (n=228). Further analyses revealed several codes which contained overlapping text or that were identical in meaning. This material was combined to create new categories or themes (n=18), including one theme which represented uncategorized content which did not seem to fit with any of the categories. This data was further examined and reviewed. The 18 themes, while applicable to the study questions appeared to have overlapping meanings as well as text and were thus further reduced. A quality check was completed to verify that all codes were accounted for at each stage of data reduction to ensure that none of the data was lost or compromised in the formation of the aggregated themes. The final themes (n=8) appeared to best represent the data and will be discussed in detail, with evidentiary statements, in the next chapter.

Once the definitions were established, the units which were grouped under miscellaneous, were reviewed to determine whether they might fit within the newly established definitions for the categories. After each category was established with the corresponding units, the categories were examined for connection to one another and to the questions of interest within the study. Rodwell recommends no more than nine categories, and for this study, the final category (theme) count was 9 total (1 represented a minority report of uncategorized data) and they all apply to the participant groups (1998). The set of final categories with sub-codes make up the final codebook, and is applicable to all transcripts.

Rodwell (1998) uses minority reports to justify the absence or discontinuity of any perspective(s). She states that the minority report is created “in recognition of multiple realities and the difficulty of gaining consensus through hermeneutic dialectic, the presentation of the claims, concerns, or issues of those for whom consensus was not possible” (p. 258). While no perspectives were eliminated during data analysis, 4 codes did not resonate with the 8 themes that emerged. Evidence (excerpts) related to these codes were reviewed and a determination was made to exclude the minority report from the analysis.

It was expected that there would be some overlap between participant groups for meanings and that there would be some disagreement among and within the groups. There was some redundancy, which allows for overlapping and elimination of some categories so that there were ultimately 8 categories (themes) utilized at the conclusion of the study.

After the final report is drafted, a summary report (upon approval by the dissertation committee) will be provided to the county child welfare office as decided upon initially, during an executive management meeting. The hope would be to solicit feedback to improve the process of conducting a study and also to determine how to utilize the findings from the interviews. The social workers and office staff will be thanked and provided with feedback recognizing the work they have done in the study and for their time. They will be informed of the researcher terminating the study and any formal connection to them. The intent is to disconnect from the stakeholder group (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2002), in the interest of group empowerment.

Ethical Considerations

This constructivist qualitative study carries minimal risk to participant confidentiality and privacy. It may create minimal discomfort for some members of the hermeneutic circle. These risks were fully explained to participants prior to beginning initial interviews as part of the active consent procedure. Active consent is used as the process precludes anonymity and involves personal information that may be sensitive for some. Participants were requested to notify the researcher of any discomfort and their participants' freedom and right to withdraw without repercussion or loss of any benefits was reiterated. None of the participants disclosed any discomfort, chose to discontinue participation and all participants received counseling agencies information sheet (see Appendix R). Plans for protecting the participants' identity, their disclosures and their individual responses are outlined in the request for Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Loma Linda University.

Participants were made aware of efforts taken to protect their privacy, confidentiality and anonymity which included securing the data from interviews in the LLU doctoral student research office and storing them in a locked file cabinet. These confidentiality and privacy risks included the chance that foster care alumni, social workers or foster parents may experience discomfort if unpleasant memories were recalled. This risk could arise in the form of remembering unpleasant experiences associated with being in foster care as an adolescent, or from experiences of caring for a foster youth or recall of a negative experience which occurred in case management. Follow up referrals to address these or other emotional issues were provided to all participants (Appendix R). All processes and procedures were completed in accordance

with the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics and the Loma Linda University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher coded participant information and used coded information to de-identify their data. All transcripts and notes from meetings were also kept in a locked file cabinet in a Smith University faculty office during the study period and will be submitted to the Loma Linda University Behavioral Health Institute upon completion of the dissertation defense, scheduled for May 23, 2017.

Incentives

Incentives were provided to all participants in the study. Incentives were solicited from local community retailers/restaurants by addressing letters to the Chief Operating Officer or Chief Executive Officer. A letter was sent by US mail to request incentives for participants (see Appendix Y). Foster parents, foster alumni and some of the social workers received their choice of a gift card from The Habit Grill, Stater Bros Grocery store, Baker's Drive Thru Restaurants or Waba Grill (See Appendix W). All participants received incentives at the initial interview meeting only. Participants providing referrals were also provided a \$5 Starbucks gift card. Site administrators posting the flyers on the Facebook pages received \$25 Amazon gift cards, as requested. Any incentives not utilized in the study are earmarked for donation to the local San Bernardino County Children and Family Services office to be used as incentives for youth participating in the ILP, or transitioning from foster care, in accordance with the Loma Linda University IRB application which was submitted and approved for the study.

Researcher Contact Information

Participants were provided contact information for the researcher, the dissertation chairperson/auditor and representative of the human subject protection committee at Loma Linda University (See Appendix F, G, & H). Participants received a copy of the signed informed consent document by mail. Interviews took 30-45 minutes. The focus groups took approximately 60 to 90 minutes. None of the participants declined to participate in interviews or the focus groups, however if they had decided to, the incentive would have been provided. All participants were thanked for their time and the interviews were terminated without any reported duress or incident.

Final Samples

Foster Alumni

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with foster alumni between July 2016 and November 2016. Demographic information for foster alumni is reported **in Table 1**.

Individual interviews were audio taped by the researcher and transcribed by a professional transcription agency. Participants selected colors and identified themselves by the color names on the sign in sheet for the purpose of de-identification. Each participant received a \$25 gift card.

This participant group contained 10 adults whose ages ranged from 24 - 36. Foster youth reported their ethnic background as Black (n=3), White (n= 2), Hispanic (n= 3) and White/Hispanic (n= 2). Four foster alum were married, the remainder reported their marital status as single. The sample contained 6 females and 4 males. Two foster alum reported that they were unemployed. The remainder of foster alum were employed at

different levels which included self-employed, part time and full time employment. Only one foster alum reported being adopted. Their reported education ranged from High school graduate (n=1), some college (n=5) to college grads (n=4).

Table 1. Demographic Information for Study Participants

	Foster Alumni (n=10)		Social Workers (n=11)		Foster Parents (n=7)	
	Male (n=4)	Female (n=6)	Male (n=2)	Female (n=9)	Male (n=1)	Female (n=6)
Race/Ethnicity						
Black	2	1		5	1	3
White	1	1	1	3		1
Asian			1			
Hispanic	1	2		1		2
White/Hispanic		2				
Age						
20-30	3	4				
31-40	1	2		2		1
41-50			2	4		
51-60				3		2
61-70					1	1
Over 70						2
Education						
High Sch Grad		1				
Some College	3	2	1	2	1	3
College Grad	1	2				1
Graduate Educ		1	1	7		2
+						

The demographic survey asked questions regarding child welfare history for foster alums. Foster alum reported that they spent from 2 – 22 years in foster care. Age at removal ranged from 1 year to 15 years old. Some foster alum reported that they had experienced multiple entries into foster care (n=5) and one reported that they did not know whether they had entered foster care more than once. Foster alum reported their exit from foster care in years, and time out of care ranged from 2 years to 20 years. Eight foster alum reported emancipation (leaving due to reaching the age of adulthood) as the means by which they exited foster care, one foster youth reported being adopted and one reported leaving prior to reaching emancipation age. Foster alum reported living in multiple placements during their time in care, seven of the youth resided in more than 5 placements. Foster alum reported the length of their last placement ranged from 2 months to 8 years. They also reported the length of the longest duration of placement they had while in care. Their longest time spent in placement ranged from 4 months to 8 years. Foster alum reported that some of them had children (n=6).

Foster Parents/Caregivers

In-person Interviews were conducted with substitute caregivers. Demographic information for foster parent caregivers is reported in **Table 1**. This participant group contained licensed foster parents and relative caregivers. Participants were recruited, screened and interviewed over a 5 month period which spanned August 2016 through January 2017. Individual interviews were audio taped by the researcher and transcribed by a professional transcription agency. Ten (10) substitute caregivers met the criteria to participate in the study but only seven (7) made themselves available for the interviews.

Participants selected colors and identified themselves by the color names on the sign in sheet for the purpose of de-identification. Each participant received a \$25 gift card. The final sample of substitute caregivers consisted of 7 licensed foster parents. Two of the foster parents also provided substitute care for minor relatives placed with them by the court. One of the foster parents identified as male. The participants ranged in age from 39 to 70 years of age. Approximately 27% of the sample identified as Hispanic (n=2), 58% identified as Black (n=4) and 15% identified as White (n=1). Foster parents reported having some college (n=4), and graduate degrees (n=3). They reported that foster care experience ranged from 12 – 30 years. Only one of the foster caregivers reported working for more than one county during their time as foster parents.

Five foster caregivers reported having cared for youth of all ages, one foster parent had worked with ages 6 and older and one had worked with youth 12 years and older. These ages matched the request that they made when they requested foster placements. Three foster parents did not have any children placed in their home at the time of the interview. All of the foster parents had provided a foster home for a teen at some period during their time as foster parents. Of those foster parents that were currently fostering, none had children older than age 10 in their homes. The length of time of having a child placed in the home ranged from 18 months to 10 years. All of the foster parents reported having biological (n=7) and / or adopted children (n=2). The number of children for the foster parents ranged from 1 – 7 children who ranged in age from 10 – 40 years of age.

Child Welfare Social Worker (Individual)

Individual, in-person interviews were held with child welfare social workers over a period of 5 months from July 2016 through November 2016. Demographic information for social workers participating in individual interviews is displayed in **Table 1**.

Individual interviews were audio taped by the researcher and transcribed by a professional transcription agency. Twelve (12) child welfare social worker interviews were conducted at a Southern California site. Each social worker received an honorarium (\$5 gift card) for their participation.

Participants selected colors and identified themselves by the color names on the sign in sheet for the purpose of de-identification. Subjects also completed a short (10 item) demographic questionnaire. Participants ranged in age from 35 to 60 years old. The ethnic makeup of the group was White (n=4), Black (n=5), Hispanic (2) and Asian (1). Nine participants were case carrying social workers, two were senior social workers and one participant self-reported as a social work assistant. All participants reported having at least some college, 3 had Bachelor level degrees, six participants had MSWs and three had psychology or sociology degrees. The selected county participates in Title IV-E internship training and approximately one-third (n=3) had completed internships with the county child welfare agency as a requirement of a BSW or MSW program. Ten participants were female. Six participants reported their time on the job as 11 years or more, two participants as 6-10 years, three reported being on the job 3-5 years, and one reported working between 0-2 years. The majority of participants (n=9) reported that less than 10 percent of their current caseload contained youth age 14 or older. The remaining

participants (n=3) reported that youth age 14 or older were between 95 - 100 percent of their current caseload.

When asked their level of comfort having sexual or reproductive health conversations with youth on their caseloads on a scale of 0 - 10, with 0 being completely uncomfortable and 10 being completely comfortable, approximately half (n=6) rated their comfort level as 10. All participants indicated that foster and biological family should discuss dating and sexuality issues with youth. Most participants (n=12) indicated that a public health nurse should discuss issues of dating and sexuality with youth. Two participants reported their belief that social workers should not discuss dating and sexuality issues with youth.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS/FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the final themes which emerged from which the data, codes and categories. The chapter further discusses the meaning of the theme, as well as illuminates core contributing concepts or categories which were found to be significant and had relevance and meaning for the identified theme. Lastly, the thematic evidence from the data is presented in each of the sections to help describe the participant's construction of dating and sexual socialization of foster youth.

The primary focus of the dissertation study was to examine the practices, opinions and understanding of socialization of foster youth to dating and sexual behavior. Eight (8) themes arose from the interview data. The themes which were found to be most relevant to the issues outlined in the study were: 1) Vulnerability and Decision Making 2) Resources and Access; 3) Adolescence: Between Two Worlds; 4) Collaboration, Liability and Risk; 5) Foster Care Experience; 6) Independent Living Programming; 7) Sexual Socialization Practices and 8) Relationship. Table 2 provides a visual representation of the themes and some of the categories which comprise the themes that emerged.

Table 2. Themes for Sexual Socialization (N=8) of Foster Youth and Core Contributing Concepts

Themes	Core Contributing Concepts
Vulnerability and Decision Making	AWOL, gender, judgment, lack of information, needing love, disapproval, alcohol and substance abuse, stigma, isolation, parental history, powerlessness, reluctance, wanting family, shame, ignorance, homeless, inappropriate interactions, vulnerable, wanting to belong, wanting intimacy
Resources and Access	Common connections, lack of resources, language, best source, most information, barriers, family members, parental accessibility, Planned Parenthood, resilience, taking risks, disclosure of foster care
Adolescence - Between Two Worlds	Age, appropriate curiosity, behavioral cues, rebellion, youthful experimentation, childhood, contemporary, developmental maturity, guidelines, immaturity, normative sexual behavior, painful transitions, puberty, readiness
Collaboration, Liability and Risk	Confidentiality issues, delegate, working together, information, liability, responsibility, voice, mutual education, positive outcomes, support, training, supervision, street level bureaucracy
Foster Care Experience	Caseloads, different, foster home, extended foster care, group homes, inconsistency, instability, involuntary, mother absence, ownership, protective, prudent parent, receiving homes, relative placement, victim, staying home, stern caregiver, respect
Independent Living Programming	Conservative, distinction between policy and services, emancipation, peers, saving money, special needs, system bias, expecting excellence
Sexual Socialization Practices	Conversations, culturally sensitive, appropriate behaviors, birth control, factual information, romantic vs sexual, pros and cons, sexual identity, communications, behaviors, religion, shame, rite of passage
Relationship	Comfort level, opportunities, honoring abuse story, mentors, privacy issues, mistrust of adults, probing formally and informally, questioning, reflection, trust

Vulnerability and Making Decisions

One of the consistent impressions that arose during the interviews was the decision making process that was ever present for all of the social workers and foster parent participants. One feature of the responses which was supported by the data was the notion of having to make decisions about providing information to foster youth in the face of little to no information regarding criteria, roles or regulations. This type of ‘response as needed stance’ taken by social workers and foster parents required confidence and competence. These actions by foster parents and social workers represent a particular vulnerability, resolve and commitment. The data reflects decision making which for the most part reflects that they err on the side of safety and protection for the foster youth. Information was reportedly provided to foster youth, but this often occurred in the face of reluctance and fear of making a wrong statement. Figure 2 is a hierarchy chart which illustrates the relative quantity of coded information within the categories which make up the theme, Vulnerability and Decision Making. For example, the code which appears in the top left corner of the chart entitled “lack of information regarding sexuality” was comprised of 1373 words, whereas the code which appears in the bottom right corner of the chart entitled “clubbing and partying” was comprised of 304 words.

lack of information regarding s...	adult role models	being female	feeling stigma	being male	trauma	feelings of sha...
	ability to make good choices					
foster parent provided informa...		peer behavior	supervision	openness to ...	ongoing co...	received se... ignorance
	empowerment					
family of origin influence						
	needing love	disapproval	inappr...	feelings of...	parent la...	no trustw... you deve...
judgement		the other piece of self-...				
	monitoring		parenthood	homeless		only girl my siste...
		media influences		AWOL from placeme...		
acceptance and approval	inappropriate interaction w...		parental history			being ... alcohol...
		wanting to belong, fit in		respect equals survival		
reluctant to ask questions	fear of harm	powerlessness	earning indepe...	first love	connection to s...	
					clubbing and pa...	

Figure 2. Theme 1 - Vulnerability and Decision Making

The issue of vulnerability as a theme was observed throughout the data review and analysis as it was highlighted for foster alumnae in their recount of times that they felt powerless due to being away from home, by being homeless or when they experienced being AWOL (on runaway status) from a placement home. This sense of being vulnerable also comes out around gender and being treated a particular way by the social worker or foster parent based on that characteristic. Foster alum reported feeling especially vulnerable around judgment regarding reasons for being in care, their early experiences, stigma of being in foster care and the accompanying feelings of isolation

which left them with some fear and reluctance to ask questions or to acknowledge that they felt that foster parents disapproved of their choices and social workers saw them as ignorant regarding suitable and customary behaviors based on trauma response and as a result of family of origin influence and expectations. Some representation of these issues are listed here.

Foster parents and social workers stated various reasons that foster youth need to be provided with information.

“They are a vulnerable population. They’re seeking validation that people in some cases made them feel that they are not worthy of certain things, and it kind of comes back to how did you become a foster child in the first place.” FP, male

“They are represented disproportionately in the sex trafficking, and there’s a reason for that.” FP, male

“[What] they’ve witnessed as children, I think have twisted some of their [foster youth] perspectives of things that are okay.” FP, male

“A lot of foster youth coming out of group homes, going out into the world, that have no clue on what a relationship is all about.” SW, female

“What in your mind is lacking, what emptiness you’re feeling that you feel that this [having sex] is the way you’re getting love from people who don’t love you.” SW, female

Foster parents respond around what they see as the basics of conversations around dating and sexual behaviors and the overall desire to protect foster youth which is met by giving information to foster youth.

“I talk to them about not having sex, to wait and not have sex because you don’t know if they’re [partners] using you at the beginning because it’s a need that the guys have” FP, female

“[I] just try to educate them, give them the possibilities, and build up that self-esteem and that self-image, so that they can reach a little higher than just anybody that will have them” FP, Female

Social workers report instances of disapproval of foster youth behaviors by the foster parents in terms of what is considered standard for youth that are placed with them.

“I have one that already she requested the child to be removed, because she is behaving like a regular teenager, and she is having [sex] ... she’s 14, having interest in boys and everything.” SW, female

“They can’t force their values [on foster youth], especially on youth who may be homosexual.” SW, male

“Basically, I tell them that they can’t go by their, you know, their expectations, their values, they have to accept the child for who they are.” SW, male

“I’m going to need you to stretch yourself a little bit to see that this child needs for someone to love them, to guide them, to protect them, they need to know that you’re going to do those things for them.” SW, female

“As soon as they see the first thing, they want to call for a seven-day notice, because this kid is doing stuff they are not comfortable with.” SW, female

In situations where it appeared that foster parents and social workers were not comfortable to be the person that provided the information about dating and sexual behavior, they were committed to point the youth in the right direction.

“My suggestion to kids is that you want to speak to someone that you would actually think highly of. Because then you are more likely to listen”. SW, male

“Yeah, it was kind of like if you think you need something like this, I would talk to your doctor, and they can let you know how to receive those things.” SW, female

“I told her, you should go to your therapist, or your foster mom.” SW, female

“If they have all the siblings that they still have a relationship with, all those long-term connections, through the older siblings, the older friends who could be able to, who they can confide in, who can provide them information that would be good.” SW, female

“You want to speak to someone that you respect and like, and love, and I would mean teachers, parents, friends, cops, priests, whoever it is, just pick someone that has a good head on [their] shoulders to speak to, along with be a mentor, have as a mentor.” SW, male

This position taken by some social workers and foster parents was supported by a statement of a foster alum, in responding on the information regarding dating and sexual information received while in foster care.

“She was very pragmatic about the whole thing, but always supportive.” FA, female

“I mean she was definitely more strict, but she was serving – you know she was acting on my best interest.” FA, female

The ambivalence between what the social workers are comfortable to say to foster youth and what is actually said became apparent in some interviews.

“Like encouraging a kid to get on birth control. So I don’t go there, I just kind of say, you know, abstinence is best, you’re too young, it can happen to you. But I would love to be able to say we can set you up, you know we want you to be responsible and if you’re going to do that, let me know.” SW, female

“Let’s say they’re dressing provocatively. I’ve had talks where I’ve said, you know, you’re kind of sending a message and boys kind of tend to think about one thing and you know, what message are you trying to put out there?” SW, female

The effectiveness, or self-efficacy involved in helping foster youth make good decisions around dating and sexual behavior is stated by some social workers. However, it is difficult to ascertain whether this uncertainty is based on their ability to get through to foster youth or their uncertainty of responsibility to make such a directive to a foster youth.

“I personally think that we’re not going to stop a kid from having sex, and I was raised that, you know my mom flat out told the three of us girls, I trust that if you’re going to protect yourself and you’re going to get on the pill.” SW, female

“I was sitting there saying, ‘if I tell you not to you’re going to do it anyway. So I might as well get you well informed and you make the decision afterwards.’” SW, male

“One of the things that influences in particular the kids we get, is the mother.” SW, female

Social workers exhibited some anxiety around what they should be saying to foster youth and without any training to specifically address this topic or supporting policies or sanctions around behaviors it appeared difficult to know when to act and how much authority to have with foster youth around matters of dating and sexual behavior.

“I don’t say well, you shouldn’t do that because it’s not my place, number one.” SW, male

“Because you’re not supposed to be doing things like that. Because you may say the wrong thing, or you may give them too much information, it may not be age-appropriate.” SW, female

“It can be hard to find an angle without like, having the kid feel judged.” SW, female

While most social workers felt that foster parents were best suited to provide information to foster youth regarding dating and sexual behavior, some social workers were aware that some foster caregivers held very conservative positions regarding foster youth dating or being sexually active.

“I feel like they don’t think it’s important, they just want to lock the teenagers [up], that’s not really the best approach.” SW, female

“That’s the issue, you know some foster parents, don’t realize that if they don’t allow it, that’s when it’s going to happen, misbehaviors like that.” SW, female

Conversations about dating and sexual behaviors between social workers and foster youth took on a general tone of safety and warning.

“If you are being sexually active, are you being safe? Are you on birth control, are you using condoms?” SW, female

“But I try to say it the way it is, for them to be safe” SW, female

Foster parents, on the other hand, disclosed their unique opportunity to delve into behaviors that may be presenting and align their conversations around safety, using more personal or current behaviors, but also with a stronger tone of warning.

“It only takes once and you don’t want to go through an abortion.” FP, Female
“The things you need [to be] protected from are dangerous situations, bad relationships, becoming pregnant, sexually transmitted diseases.” FP, female

“Number one, safety because of safety is very important, obviously. When you are talking about these things that’s number one.” FP, male

For social workers, there was a persistent tone of ensuring that they were not outside of their authority, although they indicated a desire to weigh in, given their often constant presence with the youth’s case.

“If it is something that, you know, we’re just going to talk about a relationship, [and] if they’re asking what I would do in their situation, then I would give them like what I would think.” SW, female

When foster parents and social workers did have more conservative positions on dating and sexual behaviors for foster youth it was usually related to their own upbringing and what was done in terms of discussions around being sexually active.

“I’m like that because my grandmother was very open with her granddaughters about dating and sex and diseases, and ‘You know how men are’, and stuff like that.” FP, female

“Growing up in my house, there was just certain things that was not talked about”. SW, female

“Like in my family, I couldn’t go talk to my mother about stuff like that. I mean she was like, looking at you like you was doing it [being sexually active], and it wouldn’t be a pleasant experience.” SW, female

Some of the foster parents reported having religious beliefs and the mores around having these discussions in their homes. In the following statements foster parents make it clear that they are compelled to provide enough information to foster youth to help them make decisions.

“I’m Catholic but I talk to them about their choice, because it’s got to be their choice. It’s got to be their choice, not me putting information in their heads about you can’t do that.” FP, female

“If your religion or your belief system is that you don’t have sex ‘til you’re married, you don’t kiss, you don’t have...you don’t masturbate, you don’t do any of these things, you [will have] have a rude awakening when you step into foster care.” FP, female

“If the parents are very involved, I like to stay in touch with them, because I don’t want to go against somebody’s cultural, or religious beliefs.” FP, female

Foster alum reported that being placed in a home where religion was a large part of the family culture affected whether there would be openness regarding dating and/or sexual behaviors.

“[I] remember like one of my placements that I was in for a pretty long period, one of the longer ones, about a year and a half, they made it really clear that they were really religious, they didn’t really believe in...they believed that dating should be for the purpose of finding your soulmate for marriage.” FA, female

“When I was 16, my placement was a religious family, where I had kind of learned that I needed to be more careful and ask questions first.” FA, female

Foster parents expressed a similar sentiment, although there was no mention of religion, just the family values and the need to be as, or even more protective of foster youth than with their biological children.

“I want to know who you with, I want phone numbers, I want license plate numbers, I want – and I do get copies of [the] driving license.” FP, female

“It’s a very vulnerable population, because even more so than in some nuclear families, they’ve experienced trauma, they’ve witnessed things, and they’ve been in environments for some time, hypersexualized or they’ve seen things.” FP, male

Foster alum in reflecting on the need to have these conversations, pointed to the importance of having these conversations while in care. One alum currently working with foster youth in their current job shared an observation.

“We’re seeing it in foster youth. Nobody’s talked to them about this and they have highly disproportionate rate of unplanned pregnancies, of bad relationships, because that’s the part they have seen and been exposed to.” FA, female

Many foster alum also highlight the vulnerability that exists for foster youth, around issues of age and their status as foster youth.

“[I was] 12 years old, being in a space where there was no adults, or the adults that were there were definitely open and willing to be drinking with a 12 year old, or young teenagers.” FA, female

“Maybe this child was a victim of rape, I’ve had really young children that have been victims of rape. How do you talk to a child who’s five about something that devastating, on a level they will understand it? So you just do the best you can with what you’ve got.” SW, female

“When you’re young, you don’t know what you don’t know.” FA, female

“I really had to fend for myself. Who’s really going to help you besides yourself? And so, I almost felt like a lone wolf in that case, because I was really out on my own.” FA, male

“Because I was in foster care, I didn’t really feel comfortable with them [peers] knowing that I was in foster care.” FA, male

Foster alum report gender specific differences in advice and treatment received by foster parents and social workers.

“We’re being approached, especially when you’re a young woman, by you know, by older men, or older meaning just older than you in age, not necessarily old men.” FA, female

“I lived in a home where there was boys and girls, and the girls had to stay inside.” FA, female

“She [foster mom] was always like, telling me you better not get nobody pregnant.” FA, male

Vulnerability was also present in interviews with foster parents around special needs and the use of alcohol and controlled or illegal substances.

“Lots [have] attention deficit disorder, which makes it difficult to establish relationships with other people.” FP, female

“He [foster youth] was developmentally delayed, so he needed it an older age, where he could actually hear it [information on dating and sexual behavior].” FP, female

One foster alum made a statement which suggests a connection between using substances and the vulnerability it creates around sexual behavior.

“Sexual education should also be connected to substance abuse.” FA, female

A social worker makes a comparison regarding being able to speak with children and adolescents about drug abuse and their effects, and the uncertainty of being able to speak with youth about dating and sexual matters.

“Drug issues you can discuss with these children that are that young, so I hope someone does a study about that one day, about how soon should you start talking about that because they’re being exposed to it in their natural environments.” SW, female

Resources and Access

The theme of resources was developed from data that emerged around questions of how foster youth could gain more knowledge around dating and sexual behaviors as well as their ability to access these resources. This issue of navigating living spaces while being a sexual being and needing outside advice and help arose in terms of barriers, language, education and risk taking around asking for services and also having to disclose one’s status of being in foster care. This sunburst pie chart illustrates 10 of the categories which comprise the theme Resources and Access. The relative amount of the data coded to each of the categories within that theme is indicated by the size of the slice of the pie. For example, evidence coded to “access to sexual information” consisted of 1,953 words coded to that category, whereas, “lack of resources” consisted of 794 words or coded to that category.

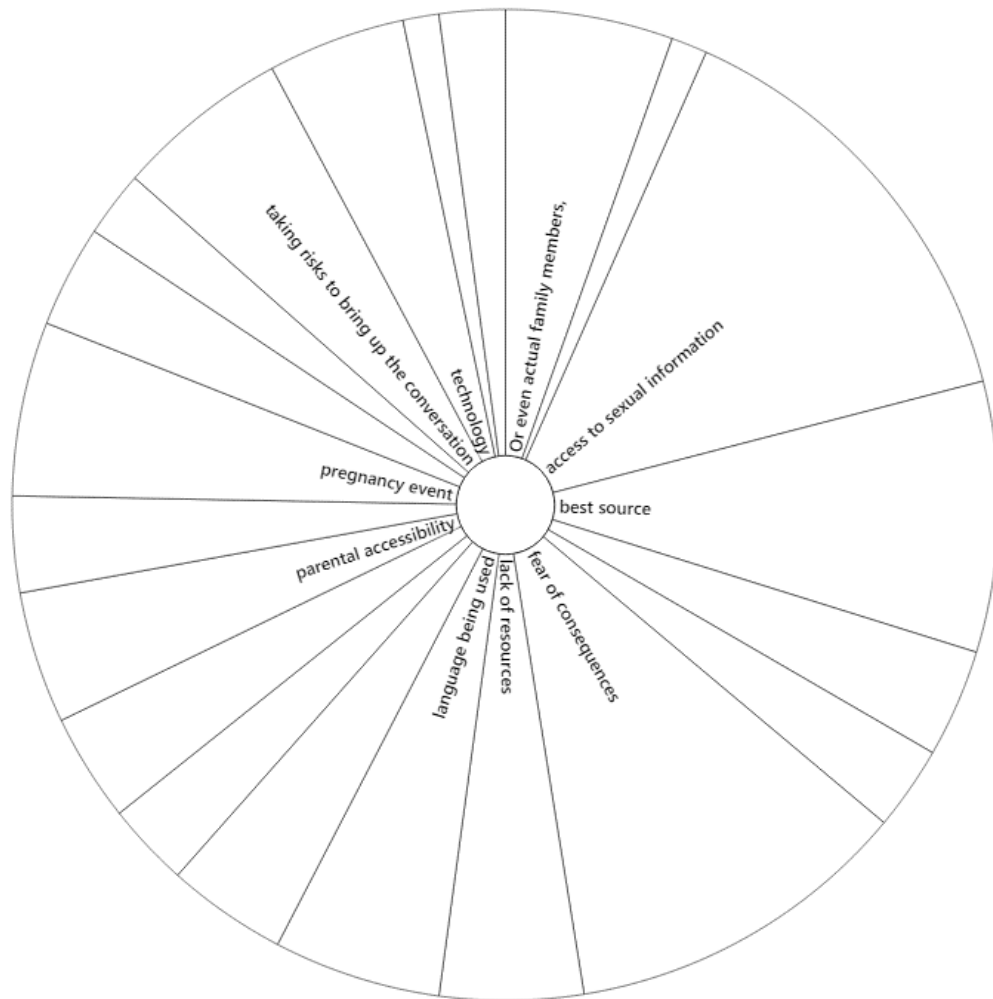


Figure 3. Theme 2 – Resources and Access

Foster parents acknowledged that as a resource to the county they sometimes feel put upon, not by the foster youth, but by social workers when they are in need of a placement.

“Not really telling the foster parent what’s really going on, you understand? They just want to—you have a bed, you know and then they just drop them off.” FP, female

Foster parents discussed various ways to connect foster youth with a network of people in the event they do not develop a relationship with the youth that feels trustworthy or open, they will have others that they can turn to.

“I do know they have different organizations that you can take your teenagers to if you don’t feel comfortable or if you’re not that knowledgeable about sex and dating and all that.” FP, female

“We really trust trying to find somebody in their life – a grandma, a teacher, a neighbor, a best friend – somebody that’s a connection that is good for them that is a strong one.” FP, female

“I’m not dismissing the biological parent, and certainly when those instances where the biological – and they’re not all terrible people.” FP, male

For the foster alum the people and places they had interacted with during their time in foster care, this became their network of resources.

“I would say a mentor, like somebody you trust, because there’s a lot of information that [school counselor] knew that I never told my parents.” FA, male

“Locally [name deleted] community college also puts out periodic trainings on campus dating life, or anything of the sort. And we get announcements on those trainings.” SW, male

“But with that [dating and sexual information], also sending out a public health nurse, more of an education piece. Because they get more invasive. Or they ask more detailed questions about birth control, contraceptive use and how many partners you have.” SW, female

In advisement of what might work for the foster youth today in terms of a network, foster youth offered these suggestions to help establish networks for foster youth.

“Having a resource available to the youth that is completely separate from their living situation would probably be the most helpful.” FA, female

“You know, even if it’s just give them the name of the main director of the programs, or you know, invite me to a meetup once a quarter where I can meet other – you know, have some other forms of connections with people.” FA, female

“More interactive-ness with myself and other foster youth. I had no idea how many foster youth were living in [California county name deleted] because I was the only foster youth in my placement.” FA, female

There are also some formal resources that are able to provide information about dating and sexual behavior for foster and transitioning youth. Foster parents, social workers and foster alum did not all agree on the reliability of these resources as another place for foster youth to go.

“It was verbal, yeah, I mean the only thing about Planned Parenthood was think maybe one sentence about, you know, this is the place to go for resources on reproductive health, you know, contraceptives.” FA, female

“It’s Planned Parenthood, is basically where you can take kids.” FP, female

“I just went out to Planned Parenthood like by myself, and you know, it was scary.” FA, female

“I could give them an overview of that information, but they could also go and get a lot more information at Planned Parenthood.” FP, female

“I would even suggest a place like Planned Parenthood, where they can get all of the information they need, and where they can go and find out about the sexual act, they can find out about birth control, they can find out what they need to what they need to communicate with their partners.” FP, female

Foster youth may feel a need to disclose their status as being in foster care or in some instances are made to disclose their status as foster youth in order to receive certain services or to receive a special benefit. Foster parents report discussing the right of the foster child to not disclose or to choose disclosure and ways to manage it.

“I talked to her openly about how that would affect her relationship with the boyfriends and how she would handle it and how she would talk to them about it or not talk to them about it to prevent judgement.” FP, female

Foster parents also shared some of the experiences they had when they brought up dating and sexual behavior conversations, given that the child might be angry, depressed, scared about things not related to their interactions with the child.

“You have to look for those opportunities, because if you create them, they get real nervous and kind of like, oh we’re going to sit down and have ‘the talk’. You know? Wearing my headphones.” FP, female

“There are clinics that they can go to and they don’t have to tell me, but if they can trust me, if I would have to take them, I would have to take them without me letting them know, okay, I want to know everything. I think you have to give them space, but make them aware that there are places they can go.” FP, female

Social workers, foster alum and foster parents reported on the youth’s ability to gain access to information or take advantage of resources, given the monitoring and supervision that is an expectation, it appears difficult for foster youth to access resources in a private and confidential manner.

“I think I might have seen stuff on school sites.” FA, female

“[I had] very limited access outside of the home if I wasn’t at school, I’d have to stay inside.” FA, female

“First kind of access to real sexual, I think, knowledge, more of a passerby type of information gathered.” FA, female

“If [there are] people that have the information, making sure we get it.” FA, female

“Now that I am talking to you, it is good to make that [dating and sexual information], a part of transitioning the kids.” SW, female

“I thought it was my responsibility for those teenagers to kind of let them know where they can find birth control.” SW, female

“When you don’t tell a child these things, they’re going to go out and – they’re going to find it out.” SW, female

“So there going to do anything they can to have this socialization. And you can call it sexual, even if they’re not having intercourse.” SW, female

Adolescence: Between Two Worlds

The theme of adolescence for this study has similar connotations for the participants in this study (foster youth) as it has for the mainstream population. For these

participants, it is essential to consider development as it would play out in the situation of living at home and the situation of not living at home. It also is easy to understand the confusion of whether the appropriate stage is young adult or child, given the burdens of child abuse and out-of-home care. This sunburst pie chart illustrates 10 of the coded categories which comprise the theme Adolescence: Between Two Worlds. The relative amount of data coded to each of the categories which exist within that theme are indicated by the size of the slice of the pie. For example, evidence coded to “normative sexual behaviors” consisted of 2013 words coded to that category whereas, “behavioral cues” consisted of 1104 words coded to that category.

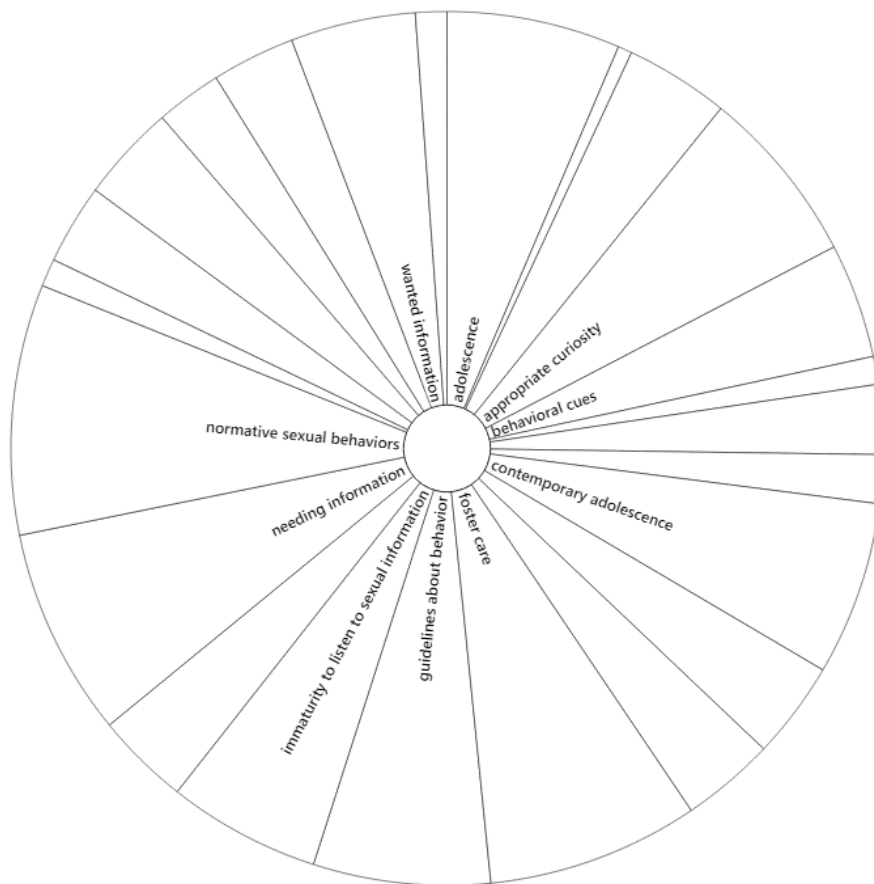


Figure 4. Theme 3 - Adolescence: Between Two Worlds

This theme captured data and is represented by codes that refer to age considerations, youthful curiosity, behaviors related to immaturity and rebellion as well as normative sexual behaviors for youth who are in the developmental stage of adolescence, and which captured adaptive behaviors for foster care context.

“Kids are all over the place trying to find their niche, who they are. So I think a best friend, and lots of friends [are needed] to start working on the socialization of sexual behavior.” SW, female

“I’m working with a young lady now that, we’re trying to get on birth control, so I took her to my pediatrician, and they go we don’t do that. And I’m going, excuse me? She goes, actually we’re right in the middle of looking at whether we should do that.” FP, female

Sexual exploration issues for foster youth was a pronounced topic in the area of sexual socialization. The issue of sexual exploration feels like it was better served under this theme as it aligns better with adolescence, but is also addressed in the sexual socialization theme.

“I’ve noticed over the last couple of years is a lot more issues when it comes to children feeling like they have to pick a side, as far as gay, straight or bi.” SW, female

“I think that, you know, I was kind of trying to figure out my sexuality, and I was looking for affection, I was trying to find, you know, fill a void.” FA, female

Foster parents and social workers indicated some distinctions around age, related to being older and younger foster youth, in terms of privileging levels of discussions, responsibility and trust.

“Well, depending on their age, and I typically take kids that are pretty high-level, so they aren’t supervised [on dates].” FP, female

“So even with my foster kids, even with my kids, make them aware depending on their age. That’s how in-depth you’re going to talk to them about it.” FP, female

“She had some sexually acting out behaviors at age 15 that were putting her at very high risk, both in the internet and in person.” FP, female

“I was 16, and I was in a placement with a foster parent, she was actually only [initially] licensed to foster infants, but she had heard about you know, me needing a place and decided to take me in.” FA, female

“When I talk to kids and they’re like, 12 and 13, and they’re telling me they’re sexually active, it kind of blows my mind.” SW, female

Discussions around what constituted normative sexual behaviors which was operationally defined by the researcher as any behaviors of a sexual nature that could be anticipated for adolescent youth in foster care, in light of their child abuse and neglect histories. These responses ranged from very low risk behaviors like holding hands to high risk sexual behaviors like engaging in random, unprotected sexual behaviors.

“They’re going to like each other, they’re going to want to hold hands, they’re going to want to make out. They’re going to want to do a lot of stuff that just comes natural, because that’s the way we were made.” SW, female

“To a certain extent, sexual experimentation is normal.” SW, male

“Boys masturbating is totally normal, even for girls, but boys tend to be more blatant.” SW, female

“Sometimes girls kiss girls, just to play around, and it doesn’t mean anything.” SW, female

“Making out is part of the exploration process.” SW, male

“People are reproducing, they are going to get married, they are going to have relationships.” FA, female

“I hear a lot of oh yeah, I just gave this boy a BJ in his truck. You know, stuff that I think would be silly. But then, you know, I don’t go down that road, right, because that would be a value statement.” SW, male

Foster parents and social workers expressed a great deal of respect for the tumultuous period of development that is adolescence. They displayed attitudes of openness and understanding of age-stage tolerance in many of the statements provided in their responses.

“Understanding development takes time.” SW, female

“Here’s like a base that we start from and I’ve explained to people, all the time especially when you’re young, you need to understand that there’s going to be a tomorrow.” FP, male

“For this age group, it’s almost all or nothing with some of these kids. This is some of their first times which comes with powerful emotions, and then hormone things that are naturally occurring, so their minds and bodies are developing, and sometimes, it’s not exactly the same time, or equal stuff.” FP, male

“I’m not talking about as far as I’d like to kiss you. Not that type of thing, but where there’s been some threatening type of things have been said. And things people talking about if this doesn’t happen, they might want to hurt themselves.” FP, male

All of the participants made remarks which were interpreted to indicate that there are youth which due to development, age, trauma, embarrassment or their foster care status might render them as too immature to be able to benefit from a conversation which focuses on dating or sexual behavior.

“Words or a conversation, I don’t think intellectually, or you just don’t have the level of maturity to sit through a conversation.” FA, female

“[One of the female youth], she got a purity ring and people were kind of making fun of her. Then she just started putting her fingers in her ears and saying la, la, la, I don’t want to hear it [lewd remarks from peers] So she didn’t want to hear it.” SW, female

“I didn’t exactly think at the time that it was something that somebody needed to show me, or teach me, or tell me about.” FA, male

“Talking to them, they’re like looking around, they’re like oh my gosh, I cannot believe you’re having this conversation.” SW, female

Collaboration, Liability and Risk

The ideas around working together for the same purposes was felt throughout the study when interviews with foster parents and social workers were in process. These two agents of change have a great deal of respect for one another although it sometimes seemed that neither party understood the great responsibility that each participant group

holds. This sunburst pie chart illustrates 11 categories of coded sources which comprise the theme Collaboration, Liability and Risk. The relative amount of the data coded to each of the categories within that theme are indicated by the size of the slice of the pie. For example, evidence coded to “Like you don’t ask, I’m not telling you anything” consisted of 1,031 word coded to that category, whereas, “collaboration” consisted of 683 words coded to that category.

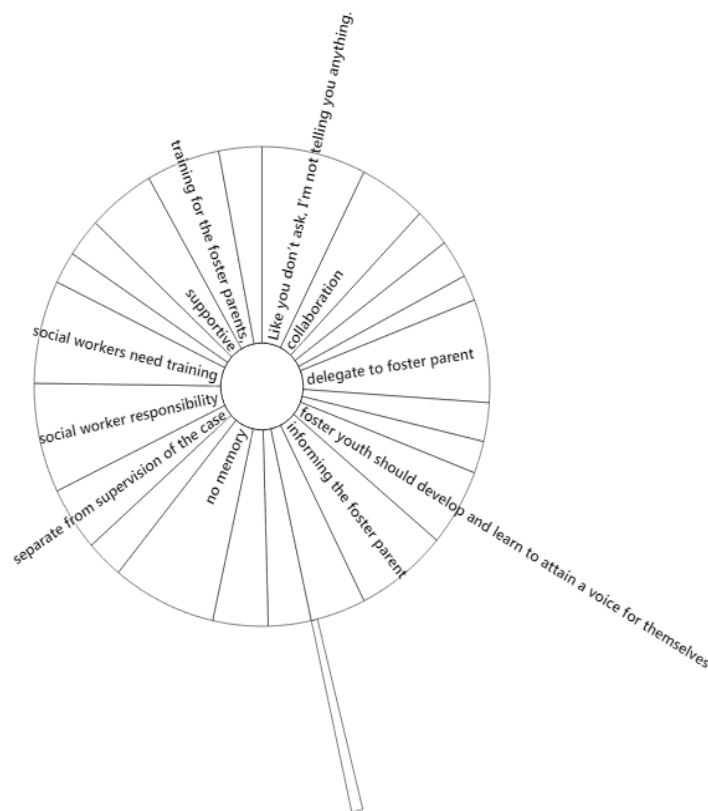


Figure 5. Theme 4 – Collaboration, Liability and Risk

There was also indicators that there are lingering feelings of mistrust and imbalance in the hierarchy as well as a misunderstanding around territorial issues on the part of both groups.

“I have talked to caregivers after talking to children, and if they said that the caregiver is who they would talk to, I’d be like well can I talk to them about what we talked about?” SW, female

“Because I feel like that’s not really my role, it’s more of a parental thing.” SW, female

The ideas of collaboration in the name of the best outcomes for children and families was apparent in some of the responses from foster parents and social workers.

“As an association, we do counseling – mentoring of parents.” FP, female

“You need a village to change everything.” FP, female

“I feel like when a child is a foster child, we all that are involved with the child should be there for this child.” SW, female

“I had the assistance of my grandmother being around [when I began fostering], so it was a good balance of both maternal and paternal sides.” FP, male

“Foster parents are playing the role of the coach, mentor, parental figure, and *that* is a parent’s job.” SW, female

“They are responsible for the daily care of our dependents. Of our youth. So when I disclose certain things, or when I share certain things with the foster parents, I expect them to do their job.” SW, male

Social workers and foster parents also see the benefit of working in concert with others who have responsibility for the care and nurture of foster youth.

“I told her, you should go to your therapist, or your mom.” SW, male

“The nurse sees them what, every six months? The therapist once a week. So I feel like we [foster parents] should be primary.” FP, female

“Teachers at school. But the people you are immediately living with are the ones that should give that information.” SW, male

Social workers and foster parents discuss the comfort level they have when speaking with one another about issues of dating and sexual behaviors for foster youth.

“Very comfortable, because they need to know, they’re with the kids more than we are, so they need to be mindful of those things. So, I’m comfortable.” SW, female

“I do if they come under my roof, I do. Because I want my kids, because I don’t look at them as my foster kids, I look at them as my kids, you know, from another mother.” FP, female

“I’m just watching this kid, I’m not going to – I work with caregivers enough to know that that’s some of their attitude. Not my issue, because sex is so taboo in our society, they don’t want to touch it.” SW, female

One of the benefits of collaboration that would help foster parents and social workers work together in a more cohesive and comprehensive manner would be to provide clarity of responsibility for tasks to either one or both parties.

“I mean clear detail or protocol about what we could do and couldn’t do, with regards to that.” SW, male

“Yes, definitely, they, you know, they asked me, or they told me it was up to me, but actually it takes two.” FP, female

“Just being comfortable, you know, that we’re not stepping outside of the context of our jobs.” SW male

“I’m thinking that’s not my place even discussing that with you, because that’s your mother or dad’s role.” SW, female

“Sometimes the foster parents - sometimes the foster parents don’t want to deal with this.” SW, female

“There will come a time where I’m going to have to, because you’re going to have those caregivers that are squeamish about doing it. They’re going to say this isn’t in my job description.” SW, female

Foster Care Experience

The theme of foster care was a continuous thread throughout the interview data. Most of the responses were specific to the context of foster care as it was the natural connection between all participant groups. The issues of dating and sexual behavior for foster youth is seen as something extra for foster youth due to mandates inherent in the child welfare system and the foster care experience. Socialization to dating and sexual

behavior is, in fact an aspect of well-being which is related to foster youth adjustment and day to day existence, especially for adolescents.

This theme captured responses and is composed of issues of caregiving, placement types and reasons for removal from care and current substitute parenting. These factors overlap and are intertwined for foster youth, foster parents and social workers and there were many responses related to the inconsistency and instability of foster care, as well as spoken and unspoken rules for foster youth. Figure 6 is a hierarchy chart which illustrates the relative quantity of coded information contained in the theme, Foster Care Experience. For example, the code which appears in the top left corner of the chart entitled “prudent parent” was comprised of 1285 words, whereas the code which appears in the bottom right corner of the chart entitled “wait for youth to settle before discussing” was comprised of 77 words.

prudent parent	importance of respect	sexual abuse victim	inconsistency	multiple placements	placement type
ground rules about dating					
foster parent history and experience	group homes	multiple social w...	stern caregiver	from abusive ho...	ownership of t...
	domestic violence	extended foster care	raped	corporal puni...	why I was pl...
foster home	mother absence	teen pregnancy	certain case lo...	timing	prote... rec...
instability	differrnt than regular people	relative placement	protective of th...	staying home	wait for ...

Figure 6. Theme 5 – Foster Care Experience

One foster alum noted that conversations felt less awkward when they occurred as an orienting aspect to entry into foster care or independent living.

“Whether you are a social worker or foster parent; just having a little bit more of that conversation about here’s who I am, here’s how I expect to be in your life and you know give some anticipation of that.” FA, female

Foster parents validated their credibility to provide a high level of quality care to foster youth in a number of ways, leaning in on previous parenting experiences, length of time spent providing care and previous work history as a way to inform the opinions, practices and experiences that they were reporting on.

“I’ve been like a social worker kind of thing because I used to work in a social service agency and I’ve lived in this community [county name withheld] for so many years that I know all the resources.” FP, female

“One of the biggest things that I talk to, and I’ve come from a previous law enforcement background as well.” FP, male

“I’ve been doing this long enough now, that a lot of my kids that I’ve worked with or have had in my home, are having children now.” FP, female

“I’m a foster parent, but I’m also a Girl Scout leader and I’m a Girl Scout leader for teens.” FP, female

Foster parents and social workers noted the level of sensitivity of speaking with youth in lieu of their natural parents about information which may be regarded as culturally unique and highly personal.

“I really believe in the parental part, in something that sensitive. That’s information as a parent, I wouldn’t want any other person telling my child but me.” SW, female

Foster parents recounted stories of children and youth that they had encountered and hosted over the years. The authentic caring and relational issues became apparent as they unfolded a variety of past experiences.

“I think I would wait until they’re comfortable and until they get to know me, like eight months maybe.” FP, female

“We need to be cognizant of the fact that sometimes they may have feelings of lack of self-worth and things that sometimes biological kids don’t have to think about. They know they are loved and nobody’s going to ever abandon them. Sometimes I think that this population has that abandonment thing going on.” FP, male

Foster alum also reported on the various experiences of receiving rules around the topic of dating or sexual behavior they when were placed in different types of placement or while they were placed in different placement homes.

“I had some measure of ground rules that were given to me in almost every placement I was in.” FA, female

“They just said not to have sex while we were living there.” FA, female

“All of the placements that I had never gave me information about dating either.”
FA, male

There were reports of inconsistency and instability on the part of the system, for example, between different foster caregivers and different social workers, counties, etc.

“What I perceive is the biggest challenge to helping foster youth feel empowered to talk about this sort of thing is that there’s so much discrepancy in the foster families between what they believe is appropriate to talk about.” FA, female

“I didn’t really feel like I was there long enough to really have that kind of rapport, or like, relationship.” FA, female

“There has to be consistency, and unfortunately, I didn’t have that.” FA, male

“All the different families in every placement have different rules in terms of what they believe is appropriate and healthy and they were all acting within what they believed.” FA, female

“I had a whole bunch of different social workers, so stability would have been nice.” FA, female

“It’s harder to find a relationship with the foster family or the social worker when there is no stability.” FA, female

“Social workers need to make sure that they’re stable, and I understand that they have a lot of foster children on their caseload nowadays.” FA, male

“I’ve heard that there’s a policy, but I’ve not seen it. It’s not something that’s really being done.” FP, female

Social workers and foster parents and related that they were truly committed to their jobs and their missions to work in service to children and families. It was easy to sense the ownership they claimed over the children on their caseloads or that had been placed in their homes.

“I treat my kids like they are mine, and I want to make a difference in my children.” FP, female”

“I’ve been able to concentrate mostly on providing some male role modeling and mentorship to my sons.” FP, male

“I don’t give up on them, because you don’t know. I had one that I almost gave up on but I was like, you know what? I mean, I was like, maybe it was God telling

me You have this, so I want you to have these four kids and I need you to help raise them.” FP, female

“I always see the kids are a part of my life and I don’t want to get rid of them. I have never used respite.” FP, female

Foster parents also take in children that they don’t have all of the information on. This puts the foster family in an awkward, tenuous position because they feel duty bound to protect their current family constellation from any negative action which may result from fostering.

“We have to be open minded that these things could happen or will happen. And if we’re not open minded, and of course, we have to learn that kids are growing up.” FP, female

“I’m the one usually ask the questions, you know, because I want to make sure that we all stay on the same page. And then, plus I have a husband.” FP, female

“Usually I try to get the background. First thing I usually ask them is, is there any sexual content involved, because I have a nine year old and I have to protect her.” FP, female

One of the things that has been instituted for the child welfare system in recent years is the notion of a prudent parent. Prudent parenting refers to the foster parent being instilled with the power to make decisions for the best interest of the child in their home in terms of outings, decisions for socializing and other activities to make the child feel less stigmatized as a result of being in foster care. Several of the respondents referred to the application of prudent parenting around dating and sexual socialization of foster youth.

“If you’re curious, and you have questions, you know, we really need adults to make it a safe place.” FA, female

“I think that there is a bit of an assumption that foster parents will say what needs to be said, and have that talk and conversation with them [foster youth].” FP, female

“As a foster parent, I think it’s our responsibility for these kids not to do that cycle again, because they want a family of their own.” FP, female

“Sometimes when you overhear things, or you see things, and I’ve definitely felt it’s my obligation to say something.” FP, male

“But when I see something that I feel is inappropriate for the male or the female child then I’m going to say stuff, and I’m going hey, come here, let me holler at you for a minute.” FP, male

While social workers support the notion of prudent parenting, there is a feeling that this policy doesn’t go far enough in specifying the locus of control for the foster parent in socializing foster youth.

“You know, the foster youth decides they want to go on a date, there is the prudent parenting, so you [foster parent] can kind of use your judgment. If it’s you know, the child is going to a movie or whatever. But beyond prudent parenting, that’s all I’ve got.” SW, female

“But the way that you go about dealing with your grandchildren are not the way these children are socialized.” SW, female

Independent Living Programming

While the interviews did not contain any direct questions about Independent Living Programming (ILP), the area of responsibility for delivering information to foster youth regarding dating and sexual behavior was often assumed to be the Independent Living Services Program. All participants felt that the Independent Living Program, as the entity within the child welfare system should or does hold the responsibility and in some cases was considered a resource that foster youth have at their disposal. The positioning of the Independent Living Program for the most part is an arm of the child welfare services, an additional mandated service within the child welfare system. This sunburst pie chart illustrates 11 coded categories from which the theme Independent Living Programming was developed. The relative amount of data coded to each of the

categories within that theme are indicated by the size of the slice of the pie. For example, evidence coded to “ILP” consisted of 864 words coded to that category, whereas, “transitional program” consisted of 391 words coded to that category.

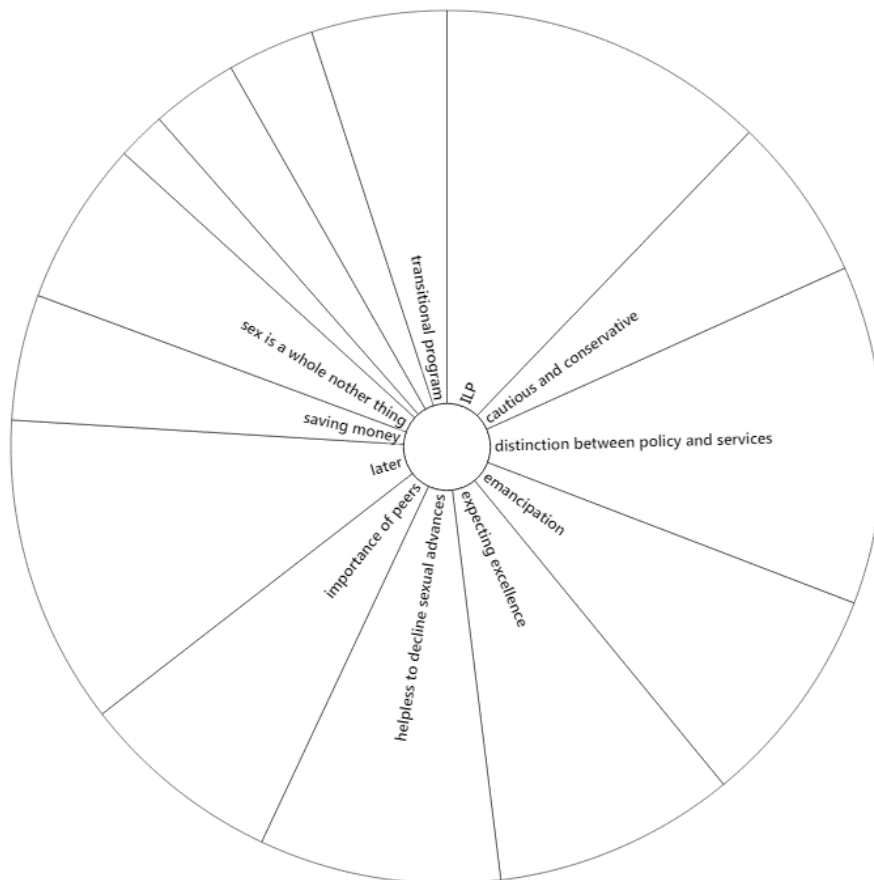


Figure 7. Theme 6 - Independent Living Programming

Services are not provided at the whim or generosity of the child welfare system. Services are mandated and foster youth are entitled to access to these services once they reach 15.5 years of age.

“They do provide a lot of resources for the youth.” FP, female

“It’s really not geared towards dating, it’s more – and actually it’s a case-by-case thing.” SW, female

“It helped me become strong and like, independent all the way from 18-25.” FA, male

“The first time that I even had any kind of discussion at all with a foster parent regarding dating and sexuality was when I was 16.” FA, female

“They also helped us. We just had a workshop, and they told us – kind of the same thing, but different documentaries.” FA, female

“I don’t know if they operate an ILP. You know, my feedback from ILP, it’s not very positive.” SW, male

“When I aged out of care, I was given a big binder of resources, and that [dating and sexual information] was one of the resources.” FA, male

Outside of the feelings about ILP, there was also a sense from foster parents regarding what needs to be done, an acknowledgement that whatever is done would be outside of their locus of control.

“We should definitely provide those resources and reach out to make sure that they have a support system, so they’re [teen parents in foster care] not losing their children.” FA, female

“I think that our kids are not getting what – their needs are not being met through the system. They’re just not.” FP, female

“One person can’t fix it. And it doesn’t start at our level.” FP, female

“If everybody waits for somebody else to do it, it doesn’t get done.” FP, female

Sexual Socialization Practices

This theme developed in relation to the overarching construct of sexual socialization. When asked how they would define sexual socialization foster parents and social workers responded in very similar ways. They most often stated that they felt it was anything that helped foster youth develop into fully functioning human beings. They

mentioned words like self-esteem and self-worth in support of their motivation to help foster youth.

This theme is comprised of those issues of a more individual nature of socialization processes, as opposed to sex education to a group of people, although it is important to acknowledge that sex education is a component of sexual socialization. The examples in this section will highlight relational aspects of relationship building necessary to facilitate communication of a sensitive and personal nature, most importantly was comfort level, issues of cultural considerations brought forth in responses, the actual practices reported, mode of communication, sources of communication and content of information provided. Figure 8 is a hierarchy chart which illustrates the relative quantity of coded information contained in the theme, Sexual Socialization Practices. For example, the code which appears in the top left corner of the chart entitled “individual conversations” was comprised of 1996 words, whereas the code which appears in the bottom right corner of the chart entitled “competent” was comprised of 475 words.

individual conversations	factual information	social worker provided...	peers	discussion about...	discuss appropria...	
conversation about sex or dating	help clarify romantic from sex...	PHN gave inf...	sexual behavior	school sites	religion	personal ex...
sexual socialization of foster youth	sex education	peer to peer education	referred to...	shame	I got it f...	lesbian,...
	health					
no information	social workers didn't really tal...	mode of communication	directed to medical ...	leave it to ...	I provide t...	
		case by case basis				
films, videos brochures and pictures	provided tangible resources	sexual identity exploration	culturally sensitive	those wer...	co...	
			No information.			

Figure 8. Theme 7 - Sexual Socialization Practices

Sexual socialization can be thought of as such a broad topic, which includes many different aspects of an individual's life. Social workers and foster parents were polled as to what they thought should be considered when researching this topic.

“Trying to identify whether I want to date girls or if I want to date boys.” SW, female

“Kissing. Yeah. Actually they do everything, they're full on, intercourse, oral sex, kissing, all of that, yeah, that's what they're exposed to and they're like, they're interested in it.” SW, female

“Because that is an important aspect of human life – of being human. And when it's not allowed, they're going to find a way of doing it.” SW, female

“It's interacting with not only their peers but adults, and sort of finding appropriate ways to relate to people in their world. Educating on sort of like the interpersonal part of that, and then also the biological part.” SW, female

“It means anything pertaining to dating, intercourse, whatever it is that pertains to two people getting together. Male/female, female/female, heterosexual, homosexual, whatever.” SW, male

Comfort level also appeared to be related to competence and was an important aspect to consider for foster parents and social workers to address their willingness as well as to have these discussions with foster youth. The responses in this area were similar for most of the foster parents and social workers.

“I am comfortable talking about it [dating and sex] with foster youth, because of the way I was brought up, and I don’t ever remember my mother even saying the word sex.” FP, female

“I really think if a public health nurse went out there, just as a component of what we do, and say hey look, this is what sex is, because some people identify sex differently. So this is what’s sexual, this is what sex is. Do you know what it is? “Do you know if you are interested in having sex?” SW, female

“They may know, I’m not that knowledgeable about different type of birth control pills, what if they have, you know, different side effects?” SW, female

“If you are more casual about it, I think that things will work out better all the way around.” FP, female

“We can’t be like shocked and acting indifferent when they ask about certain things in their natural environment, but learning how to talk with them about it in a comfortable way that we don’t seem like we’re completely freaked out about it.” SW, female

“I don’t know what to say to this child. So we try to find somebody in the professional – because I don’t know that social workers really know.” FP, female

Foster alum also weighed in on the topic of comfort level and competence in having these conversations with foster parents and social workers.

“Lot of foster parents might be comfortable taking about it, but just might not really have the knowledge, or know where to go with the conversation.” FA, female

Responding to how the information is imparted to foster youth, a plethora of responses from foster parents and social workers that highlighted the need for verbal communication and materials to reinforce conversations that had taken place.

“There’s no pamphlets or anything that I give out. If the subject comes up, then we talk about it.” SW, male

“Let’s say they say yeah, I’ll be like OK what, are you having sex? And I’ll just ask them. Very straightforward.” SW, female

“It took two ways. One sitting down and talking to them and the other one was writing it.” FP, Female

“I would want them to look at videos. I would probably show them videos of different things that I’ve learned growing up.” FP, female

In reviewing the responses related to the actual practices around socialization, it appeared that the social workers and foster parents have a keen sensitivity to the plight of the foster youth and those considerations were made obvious throughout the interviews with these participants.

“Hey, it isn’t their [foster youth] fault they’re in this situation. So if I were to give up on her, I would have been that next parent that gave up on her.” FP, female

“Because if one of my kids comes to me and if they take the energy and effort to want to know, I feel like it’s my obligation to not be uncomfortable in any manner of stuff.” FP, male

“I often say to people, nobody goes down and joins Foster Children of America, I mean that’s what nobody does. It’s circumstances sometimes beyond their control, and they obviously end up here and they’re relying on people outside of their biological group to raise them, and get them to the next level.” FP, male

“There’s mental health issues, and the trauma and everything that this young gal is just really struggling.” FP, female

It was also notable that the foster parents acknowledge the difficulty of managing adolescence and being in foster care.

“There’s a lot of peer pressure out there. I want my [foster] kids to know the truth. If you make the wrong turn, it could cost you your life, kids listen to me.” FP, female

Social workers, foster parents and foster alum reflect on the issues of relationship building and trust and this feature is positioned between what was imparted and what was

received. The sensitivity of the information was reflected in the approaches utilized by social workers and foster parents.

“It was easier for me to work with the youth, and we like to talk about stuff. Like you know what, because we had built that relationship.” SW, female

“I’ve known social workers that have that kind of relationship with the teens that stay involved, even into aftercare and beyond.” FP, female

“If you are going to try and counter all of the movie stars, singers, TV shows and the internet, you have to have a relationship for that child to want to hear it from you.” FP, female

Efforts to develop relationships are sometimes effective as was made apparent by what one foster alum reported.

“We got more and more comfortable, but it was just kind of like a normal conversation to have with her.” FA, female

Foster parents and social workers discussed other socialization behaviors, besides conversation, providing printed matter and media about dating and sexual behavior, they have used when providing the information to a plethora of foster youth.

“I am very structured when it comes to education, cleaning their bodies, how they live, what they wear and how they present themselves.” FP, female

“I also talk a lot about the relationship, and that their bodies are very special and very precious, and they should not be giving their bodies to somebody freely and too lightly; that there should be a relationship along with sexual activity.” FP, female

“I don’t necessarily stop the conversation if they deny it [being sexually active], but I do let them know that, you know if you decide to do that, there’s responsible ways to, we don’t think you should, we think you’re too young, but you know people get pregnant when they don’t think they can.” SW, female

“Obviously, I am not privy to all of their conversations and all their boy/girl interactions. But when you do see that, I think there’s so many opportunities that are teaching moments that we’re put in a position to be the parents to our kids, you see teaching moments.” FP, male

Participants also shared fears and concerns they have regarding youth being confronted with or getting into situations where they had no knowledge or control over the actions or experiences of foster youth.

“So allowing kids to go out and date, should they become pregnant, or hurt or something, it gets a little scary. But you can’t keep them in a box till they’re 18, because they won’t stay in there.” FP, female

“I’ve had kids that will run away and date.” FP, female

“I, you know, had personally experienced things when I had AWOL’d that I definitely wasn’t prepared for.” FA, female

“What I’ve seen is that they get so desperate that they get scared that the teenagers going to do something that they start not allowing anything.” SW, female

Foster alum reported instances where dating and sexual behaviors came up while they were in care and how the messages from social workers and foster parents landed on them and the feelings they were dealing with around dating and sexual activity.

“It would have been so much more valuable if they had just said, you know, look we want to have an honest conversation about this.” FA, female

“She was not about it. And she kind of shot that down and explained that I was too young to be dating that it wasn’t appropriate, that I needed to, you know, consider how young I was. I was about 16.” FA, female

“It was responsive, very reactionary, the information I did get about it. And it was largely very negative.” FA, female

“So it wasn’t really fully explained, but like I said, you could piece things together.” FA, male

The nature of the conversations being one on one and being able to address a specific situations also provided some ease around entering these dialogues and confidence about the information being provided.

“They [foster youth] don’t often go well, you know, what do you think I should do? They don’t go that route. They just talk to me, and that depends on what I’m hearing. And then I go down certain avenues in response to what I’m hearing.” SW, male

“It’s not really geared towards dating, it’s more – actually, it’s a case by case thing.” SW, female

While none of the in-person interviews inquired specifically on the aspect of cultural considerations, there were issues around culture which emerged from interview data.

“Hypothetically, you [could] have an English speaking child, and you have a [foster] parent who’s bilingual but they’re really more Spanish speaking, or whatever.” SW, female

“So when you’re going and you’re talking about culture, I guess finding out what the person you’re speaking to, what their own family’s culture was for them, the spectrum of culture. It would be important to know how to go about navigating what you’re asking them [foster youth] to get a true answer.” SW, female

“Because she’s Mexican and because the boyfriend was Mexican, I said okay.” FP, female

The consideration that the socialization should be done by foster parents and social workers drew responses on both ends of the spectrum. These responses ranged from parents having sole responsibility to everyone involved with foster youth having some responsibility to socializing foster youth to dating and sexual behavior.

“Because that’s something you really should be talking to your mom about. Or in general this is what happens, but I really need you to talk to Mom because you may need to go to the doctor and have some things checked out.” SW, female

“If I come to the knowledge that they are active, I usually send the public health nurse out to do the education piece with regards to that, you know, be careful, make sure to do certain things.” SW, female

One of the strategies that all of the foster parents and most of the social workers reported employing with foster youth included joining with them in making decisions, but giving the lead to the foster youth and walking beside them during the situation, or just assuring the foster youth that they would be there with them.

“I get it that you may have sex, and I want you to be safe, and I want you to have protection. So, here is a number. You can ask me, I will take you.” FP, female

“You aren’t necessarily anticipating, but when you see it then absolutely you might want to pull a young man to the side and say hey, listen man, this is what I think about that.” FP, male

“I do speak with them, but I ask them if it’s OK if we can get into specifics, because I want them to feel like they’re responsible adults and so we just actually dialect.” SW, female

“You and me together, we can find that information, and then you can make a valid decision on what you want to do.” FP, male

Another strategy that foster parents and social workers employed was instilling fear around dating and sexual behavior as a way to discourage youth from not venturing down the path toward becoming sexually active.

“I have a famous picture that I draw of, if you have sex with one person, and if they had sex with three people, and they had sex with a few, you just slept with everybody that they’d had sex with.” FP, female

“I think the beginning would be just talking and making them aware of the consequences about getting pregnant and let them know the different HIV or the other diseases.” FP, female.

“I would have to go into detail of different questions, and that’s when we start disclosing as to – start talking more in-depth about things. You know, I just let them know that there’s a lot of diseases, or sexually transmitted diseases, out there that they can get as teens.” FP, female

“I was talking about how foot fungus can spread to other areas because you put your pants on over your feet, the crotch area touches your feet, the fungus spreads to other areas.” SW, male

When foster alum were questioned regarding how they had gotten information about dating and sex and the usefulness of that information they responded in a variety of ways.

“Class, or health class, talks a lot about the same thing, sex, not sex, both the good and bad.” FA, female

“Health class only really taught me about kind of like, leading causes of death, so like suicide, smoking, drinking, stuff like that. We never really touched bases on dating, sexual abuse, assault, anything like that.” FA, male

“So you watched movies, you would gain some type of knowledge, and whatever you took out of it.” FA, male

“I wouldn’t say forced, but I had no other options to receive this information, besides getting it online.” FA, male

“I kind of self-taught myself from the internet.” FA, female

“They actually had a nurse practitioner come in every week that talked about, from sexually transmitted diseases because I was a pregnant teen.” FA, female

Foster alum were queried around suggestions for discussions or provision of information around dating and sexual behavior to current foster youth. Some ideas reflect the notion of contemporary adolescence.

“Even reading a book or a pamphlet, like that’s doing too much for a teenager.” FA, female

“Peer to peer relationships, I think, also carry more weight sometimes than adult conversations.” FA, female

“If you would have shown me some videos, I think I would have made some different decisions.” FA, female

“Definitely the way that information is presented, I think has an impact.” FA, female

Social workers and foster parents weighed in with ideas to make these conversations more palatable for foster youth.

“I think if we make ILP as a whole more interesting, and then put this topic in.” SW male

“I would actually email it [dating and sexual information] to my youth, not all together, but individually, so they can go out and they can learn more.” SW, female

“What I would do with my foster youth that were teenagers is, I would sit them down and basically have a talk with them on what was an appropriate relationship.” SW, female

The way that foster youth are engaged and conversations are approached is critical in terms of engaging youth in conversations in a manner that they will feel

connected to the information and that it can be helpful was discussed with foster parents and social workers.

“I don’t dictate to them, because I don’t have the opportunity or the type of thing where I could dictate to them as far as the rules of dating.” FP, male

“I kind of let them lead the interview process with regards to what they’re comfortable sharing.” SW, female

There was also a distinction made by foster parents and social workers regarding adolescence and the difference that is apparent between the current cohort of youth and previous youth cohorts.

“I have to be very straightforward with them, because nowadays the youth is totally different than when I was growing up.” SW, female

“A lot of my youth are of the age in the new era youth, so they do a lot of online dating.” SW, female

“We definitely do have to keep in mind dating in the 21st century [is] different today than dating in the 19th century when I came up.” FP, male

“They’re out there inventing new stuff as we speak. And so, with all the gender and new things that come up with electronics, as far as sexting and, oh all of that.” FP, female

Both foster parents and social workers remarked regarding training needs in this area of discussion as well as factual information regarding dating and sexual behavior for foster youth.

“I don’t even know what the county’s policy is on advising about birth control.” SW, female

“I know this kid’s sexually active, but I don’t know what to say to her.” FP, female

“I think as a professionally trained foster parent, you never just relied on your own personal experience. I’d like to think that we’ve had some advantages of having to do obviously required training on a constant basis.” FP, male

“It would be good for us to know, as social workers, is there something that we should be telling the caregivers and the kids about dating.” SW, female

“You know all the hours of training that I’ve taken on. Because you do get different perspectives. I mean of course I’ve had my own personal experience. But it’s nice to be able to factor in OK, the sex traffic thing that has been prevalent now.” FP, male

“I would like to have more material on how could I do that in a better way.” SW, female

“I can lean on my personal experience, and also the benefit of all the training and best practices models and stuff that I’ve been exposed to through all these hours of training.” FP, male

“We need some training on not just how to restrain a child, but how to love a child. And a lot of us, even social workers, we don’t know what love is.” FP, female

“Sexuality? I’m trying to think, in school, maybe. I don’t think we – other than the basic child development, things like that, but no.” SW, female

“I didn’t remember receiving any training at all.” SW, female

“No. You get a lot of information on sexual abuse, how to identify it, how to prevent it. But not on how to talk to kids if they are sexually active.” SW, female

In terms of passing information along regarding dating and sexuality, foster parents and social workers have not discussed these issues in coordinated ways but are open to coordinated efforts to ensure that youth receive the services they need.

“I don’t doubt that the social worker didn’t speak to them [foster youth], and I didn’t have any knowledge of it.” FP, female

“I didn’t run into a situation where I had to give them information about it [dating and sexual behaviors].” SW, female

“You know what? I don’t remember a social worker talking to me about dating or sexuality, and I did foster teenagers, but the subject never came up.” FP, female

“If the social worker knows that there’s a possibility that this child is [sexually] active, then they give you that information.” FP, female

“I just spoke to a coworker who is a translator for us. So she goes out with all of us. And I told her what I was going to be doing [participating in the study] and she said I have never heard a social worker discuss sex or dating with any of the kids.” SW, female

“I can’t think of any specific incidents where I provided – where a caregiver actually asked me pointedly for information relating specifically to dating, and subject matter relating to that.” SW, male

“Generally, I don’t provide that information.” SW, female

In response to questions about the sources of information that foster alum actually received information from while in care, responses varied among sources and foster alum.

“Those weren’t conversations we had with social workers, it might have been one.” FA, male

“But never, we went into like conversations around dating. You know, like her giving me information about stuff or having a heart to heart conversation about sexual education.” FA, male

“Probably my foster mom. Because you know, you develop a relationship.” FA, male

“If I would have heard some real stories from my peers about things that could have happened, because I was just unaware, and I definitely wouldn’t have done that for several reasons.” FA, female

“The social worker never gave me information regarding anything about dating information, my foster parents at the time never gave me information about dating.” FA, male

“Like your peers, that’s like the other piece of your self-education.” FA, male

“I talked to my peers about it of course.” FA, female

Foster parents and social workers were questioned regarding where they felt foster youth were getting the most information from regarding dating and sexual behavior.

“Well from speaking with my youth, they get a lot of their information from their peers.” SW, male

“I believe the majority of the information they get is from their peers, they get it from social media, because right now we are living and dealing with these millennials, they get a lot of it from social media, and see it from TV, social media, friends, and people.” SW, female

“They’re getting it from their friends. And the thing is, with foster youth, is they tend to stick together.” SW, female

Social workers and foster parents had varying opinions on sex education taking place in schools in light of the fact that foster youth may not be available to receive this information, often due to the transience of foster care or chaotic home situations previous to being removed and placed in foster care.

“I recall when my son was in school, we had to give permission for him to take sex ed classes, our foster youth may or may not have that same opportunity.” SW, male

“Being in the system, being in various placements, different placements, I don’t know at what age they get to be exposed to proper sexual education training.” SW, male

“I had a young man that was very confused. And so, we just went from, you know, this is a penis, and this is a relationship and healthy dating, so that he got that information.” FP, female

In response to foster youth receiving dating and sexual information from their friends, peers, classmates and the internet, social workers and foster parents had opinions and attitudes which supported and simultaneously cautioned against these sources.

“Well, I can see where somebody told you that, but look, this is why I think that’s not the best course of action. So let’s look at this, and let’s go check the research and the best scientific information available on the subject.” FP, male

Relationship

The theme of relationship encompasses those data and codes that represent the relationships and issues related to forming and maintaining relationships between social workers and foster parents, foster alum and foster parents, foster alum and social workers. This category reflected on comfort level to develop trust, mentors, issues of privacy, the ability to tolerate and initiate questions, considerations and honoring the abuse story of

the youth and the kinds of interactions which gave the advice foster youth receive around dating and sexual behavior more weight, or credibility. This sunburst pie chart illustrates 9 coded categories from which the theme Relationship was developed. The relative amount of the data coded to each of the categories within that theme are indicated by the size of the slice of the pie. For example, evidence coded to “comfort level” consisted of 2820 words coded to that category, whereas, “reflection” consisted of 785 words coded to that category.

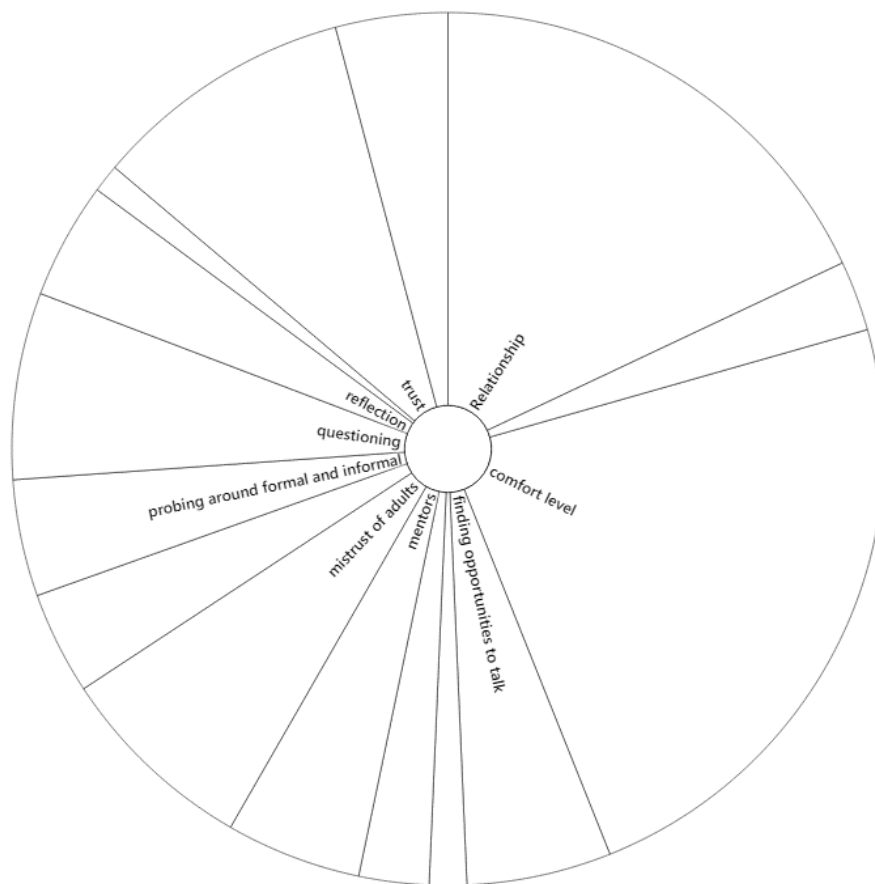


Figure 9. Theme 8 – Relationship

Foster alum related that peer information which they received was often welcomed more because of the shared experience of foster care, as opposed to receiving information from someone who was paid to case manage or house them. Foster alum also remarked about their comfort level when they had the conversations with foster parents and social workers.

“I wasn’t really comfortable, I wouldn’t even open that box with her [social worker], they’re [social workers] already in the gray area. Those were just things, I wasn’t very comfortable expressing to her about.” FA, female

“Peers, and what they have to say, carry more weight than adult conversations.” FA, female

“I always tell the youth that I work with nowadays, like you know, have somebody – there’s always somebody out there that has your best interests.” FA, male

“Maybe one of the reasons why my foster mom didn’t talk about it [dating and sexual behavior] is probably because she felt uncomfortable.” FA, male

“That was uncomfortable just because there were so, I think, non-open minded. So it was uncomfortable for me to think about bringing it up, or if something kind of got close to it, I would kind of steer away from it.” FA, female

“I would have been comfortable if my social worker told me information about it, or if I had a, you know, a mentor that could give me some tips and information on that, too.” FA, male

“Counselor or therapist. I would have even been comfortable with it if my school counselor gave me information on it.” FA, male

When discussing comfort level to have these conversations with foster youth, foster parents gave opinions about why the conversations have not occurred and related about the expectation that they would deliver the information.

“Americans are a little funny about sex.” FP, female

“For them [foster youth] to be cut off from their whole family, and their whole life, and go live with me, or some stranger family, good, bad, or indifferent, and have somebody there to talk to you about anything personal, is really uncomfortable.” FP, female

“Most cases I feel like when they do, they’re comfortable enough to even engage you with that conversation, you definitely should be ready, so it’s not ‘oh, go talk to your mama about the birds and the bees’.” FP, male

“I’ve catered to just the young men recently because it’s been a population that’s really – well, it’s been difficult for – some people have been difficult to place, some of the males and of course, me being a male, I’ve never been uncomfortable with that [discussing dating and sexual behaviors].” FP, male

Social workers discussed the challenges of having conversations about dating and sexual behaviors with youth who were uncomfortable about having the conversations, whether it was due to disinterest or discomfort. They also opened up about their comfort regarding initiating these discussions particularly when the foster youth was a different gender.

“The language that’s used too, that kind of feels – where you feel more uncomfortable.” FA, female

“I’m totally comfortable. It’s them. It’s the foster youth that tend to go no, ewww!” SW, female

“If it’s a boy, me being a male, I am comfortable. [When it’s a girl], how comfortable am I? Generally I squirm in my seat, honestly.” SW, male

“Yeah, I’m comfortable, but what I’m seeing is that they’re not very comfortable.” SW, female

“When the girls came to me, I was like, how do I do this? It’s definitely not going to be in an office. It’s definitely going to be a walk where lots of people can see me, but the content was the same for both [male and female foster youth].” SW, male

Social workers reported reasons that they feel more apt to be entering into an area of liability when having these conversations with foster youth.

“It’s just kind of a liability for us to say like yes, that’s an appropriate thing for them [foster youth] to be doing, and then what if they date someone that’s older, and they don’t tell us?” SW, female

“I think the level of comfort was determined by the rapport, or the relationship that I have with the kid, actually.” SW, female

“I remember the first couple kids I talked to, it wasn’t easy. The more I did it, the more relaxed I got with it. And the more I realized that, gosh, they’re not all going to listen.” SW, male

For one of the foster alums there was an indication of the inevitability for the occurrence of sexual behavior in foster care.

“A young person is in foster care and, you know sex is going to happen.” FA, female

In terms of having the conversations with foster parents regarding the need for these conversations to happen with the youth in their homes, social workers report that there was little to no discomfort.

“I am very comfortable because I view foster parents as a peer, as a professional peer.” SW, male

“Foster parents are not comfortable speaking about that.” SW, female

Foster parents discussed ways that they would initiate the conversations with foster youth, who may not have shown any interest in engaging in these discussions.

“You know, I think I’d be remiss in not addressing it. I’d rather have the conversation and not necessarily eavesdropping on people, or this that, but sometimes they make their private conversation into a public conversation. I’ve taken that opportunity to use it a learning moment for them – a teaching moment, I should say.” FP, male

“If we’re watching something on TV, or a movie, or something, and it’s a little [explicit] has a sex scene, I’ll ask them questions.” FP, female

Given the different indicators of readiness to begin to have conversations around dating and sexual behaviors, foster parents and social workers suggested ways that they assess readiness to have the conversations with foster youth.

“When I know that they’re going to start dating because you kind of see the signs.” FP, female

“Don’t even know if they were having sex, they were just of the age that could have been, and so we just had the discussion.” SW, female

“I think when they’re 12, they’re more aware. The first year [of middle school] when they’re in sixth grade, they’re kind of like learning, but then they start thinking about the boys, and I think that’s about the age that you start kind of bringing it up.” FP, female

“I would say when they started going into junior high school, because predominantly that’s when they start showing the videos in school, and they may ask a question, or they may come home with a question like ‘what is this kind of sexually transmitted disease’.” FP, female

Social workers and foster parents point to barriers to having meaningful conversations with foster youth around dating and sexual behavior.

“I talked to them about it unsolicited, you have to, you know, ask permission.” SW, female

“I am more comfortable speaking to my peers about that. Unless of course, the youth tells me specifically not to share certain things.” SW, male

“I want to say [ask or talk to] your minister, your pastor? But you know, some of them be looking at these young girls.” FP, female

“The kids don’t want to tell you that they want to start a relationship.” FP, female

“I usually try to have a conversation. But I notice that the kids, well the ones that I have now, they do not – they’re very closed up.” FP, female

For foster alum, this issue of privacy and general mistrust of the adults they are interacting with in their day to day lives in foster care was apparent.

“You don’t feel like you have any adults that you can trust.” FA, female

“I didn’t even have somebody to tell about my own physiological changes, you know, who am I going to talk to about sex?” FA, female

“But even her, it’s kind of – she can breach confidentiality and tell the foster parents if they’re [social worker and foster parent] like really cool” FA, male

“When you meet a foster child for the first time, they’re a closed system. They don’t want to open up, they don’t want to give you no type of information. They pretty much have their head down.” FA, male

Efforts by foster parents and social workers were numerous in terms of the various means employed to establish trust with foster youth.

“I would rather sit down and talk to them [foster youth] than young adults here find somebody online and end up getting hurt or having sexually transmitted diseases or something like that.” SW, female

“So I would talk to them and encourage them to talk to me, especially if we’re seeing certain things, or – or even if they’re not, it’s just always good to talk to the foster kids.” SW, female

“A lot of the discussions, believe it or not, were walks. We would go walk, and just, and talk.” SW, male

“Well first you have to give that comfort, and they have to understand where you’re coming from.” FP, female

“I personally feel that, if there’s no one that they can feel comfortable with, they should at least feel comfortable with their foster parent or adoptive mom.” FP, female

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The results described in Chapter 4 and the evidentiary statements show that the study adequately addressed the study questions. How are foster youth assessed for readiness to receive information regarding dating and sexual behavior? How is information about dating and sexual behaviors delivered to foster youth, social workers and caregivers? What is the understanding of responsibility for imparting knowledge and information to foster youth? Several factors address these questions which were answered in a similar to their representation in the literature.

How are foster youth assessed for readiness to receive information regarding dating and sexual behavior? When reviewing the data and considering the various factors which go into assessing readiness for receiving information regarding dating and sexual behavior, it appears that there is not one set of circumstances or evidence which presents to signal readiness to have these conversations. Social worker responses ran the gamut from not feeling a responsibility for having to assess readiness to feeling compelled to initiate discussions with foster youth on their caseloads.

The issues which pushed toward not having these discussions were past abuses experienced by the youth to feeling that it was not within their scope of responsibility, given their irregular and sometimes fleeting appearance in the child's life, relative to parents or foster parent presence. On the opposite end of the spectrum are social workers who consistently monitor behavior changes for developmental milestones and effects of past abuse. These social workers while making note of parent, foster parent and school concerns take risks to point foster youth toward a resource or person who might be able

to address the issues more fully than they have the ability, confidence or freedom to, given their employment and professional boundaries.

Foster parents, in assessing the topic of readiness, report considerations of the gently entering into conversations after they have had an opportunity to establish a relationship with the youth and allow for the development of trust in the context of a caregiver / parenting bond. They also acknowledge not having the luxury of a warm up period. They also observe behavior and interactions with peers, peer behavior and family of origin influence to make determinations as to when these conversations might need to occur. The motivation for these conversations is reportedly also out of a need to protect or provide a protected environment for the foster youth, coming out of a place of genuine concern. There were no reports by foster parents of being mandated to have the discussions with foster youth yet, there appears to be a sense of responsibility for the care and safety of the foster youth in their home.

For foster alum who did report receiving the information, responses ranged from no memory of having discussions with social workers to foster parents who used fear of harmful consequences to make the information real for foster youth. A few foster alum reported having received any information from any source regarding dating and sexual behavior. For those who reported discussions with social workers and foster parents, they acknowledge discomfort or characterized this information as incredible or disapproving or judgmental.

How is information about dating and sexual behaviors delivered to foster youth, social workers and caregivers? For social workers who reported providing information to foster youth, they reported doing so by several means. They gave factual

information by verbally speaking to the youth on the subject - conversations which were sometimes initiated by the social worker and sometimes these discussions were the result of the foster youth asking for a referral or needing information for a friend. Often social workers reported providing pamphlets, brochures, referring youth to videos and other media which would better address the youth's needs, as it was able to hold the youth's attention and used language which was familiar to the foster youth, in accordance with the youth's preferred method of receiving information.

Foster parents, not unlike social workers, used mediums of verbal communication, drawing pictures, providing pamphlets, referring foster youth to websites and YouTube videos. The major differences in the imparting of information between these two groups is that the foster parents had more exposure, to foster youth and thus more opportunities to observe the youth in daily living interactions at home, outside activities and through school activities and friends. Foster youth reported receiving very little information and only one youth reported having received support throughout the dating process, which included an openness of the foster parent to discuss behaviors and encouragement to enter into a dating relationship with a similar aged, heterosexual partner.

What is the understanding of responsibility for imparting knowledge and information to foster youth? Both social workers and foster parents felt a sense of responsibility for providing information to foster youth about dating and sexual behavior. For the most part, at every available opportunity social workers and foster parents addressed questions and behaviors as opportunities to socialize youth to behaviors which would serve to positively impact the youth's future. The confusion regarding the

responsibility for this task did not appear to be around the issue for providing the information to foster youth, as neither party wanted to dodge the task. The confusion for the task centered around the lack of direction from the agency in terms of policies which clearly delineate, what can be discussed, with whom and what the parameters of authority were for foster youth, social workers or foster parents.

One of the areas of unanimous agreement was around the training for foster parents and social workers on dating and sexual behavior communication. Both groups of participants agreed that they had not received or did not remember receiving training and both groups agreed that they needed training to be able to address this issue for foster youth. Foster alumni also were in agreement that foster parents and social workers should receive training and that they desperately needed to receive the information much sooner than those who received the information reported having received it.

Agency and Policy Contributions

The child welfare agency is over burdened with issues of safety, permanency and well-being. Public perception and expectations oversight of these basic goals of the agency generate pressure and demands regarding services to families and children. While it is difficult to manage all aspects of development and well-being for foster youth, it is important to note that some of these tasks cannot be put off until things are more under control or there is a more convenient time or when more funding is allocated for services.

Foster youth are continuing to appear and reappear in areas which indicate that somewhere the system has failed to parent in a way that makes these youth indistinguishable from their mainstream counterparts. Luckily, there are dedicated

professionals serving in the capacities which will continue to show commitment and dedication beyond a job description or expectation. It is up to policy makers to continue to push the envelope toward the new normal that foster youth currently experience.

Traditionally in child welfare, foster parents and social workers have been silo'd in terms of training and being given an opportunity to stand in the other's shoes. Despite this culture of separate and unequal which has been put forth in written documents and verbal interactions, there is a mutually shared goal of wanting to see the young people in their care not only survive, but thrive. The team approach in child welfare is a novel idea that is rapidly catching on. However, the policy makers and stakeholders appear to be the last of the team to receive the message that when these two groups, foster parents and social workers collaborate the costs to society and to the budget decreases due to the sharing of resources and the innovative approaches to tasks already being implemented.

Training was found to increase the incidence of caseworkers having sexual discussion with teens (Polit et al., 1987a; Risley-Curtiss, 1997; Love, 2005). The issue of training continues to permeate the deficit in child welfare around this topic. Hopefully more studies of this type will continue to illuminate this need and the connection to foster youth outcomes.

System and Agency Implications

Practice

For child welfare, information from the end users of the services is valuable and can be used to shape practice and policy. The role that social workers and foster parents play in helping foster youth meet their developmental tasks is unclear. The relationship

between the social worker, foster parents and foster youth is undefined in the area of dating and sexual behavior and thus creates barriers to cooperation and communication. For this reason a study which examines the obstacles to communication processes is valuable to help develop relevant services for foster youth. Given the importance of open and clear communication in establishing expectations, this study can provide information which may assist in planning of Independent Living Programs (ILP) transition services and identify ways to support adolescents exiting from foster care and transitioning to adulthood.

Services

The need for services which are culturally relevant cannot be overstated. Adolescence is a time when youth are looking for acceptance and peer connections, including intimate opposite and same sex relationships. Services which address the needs of youth for information regarding dating and sexual behavior can allow foster youth to begin to test the waters of relationship building prior to emancipating from care. Services which are designed utilizing input from social workers, foster parents and most importantly, foster youth are likely to meet the needs of the intended recipients.

Policy

This study begins to highlight some of the areas where practice and policy don't have the intended effect of the policy as written. Because adolescent youth culture is dynamic, it is evolving in terms of how youth relate to one another and their needs to explore intimate relationships. Whether youth are exhibiting signs of readiness to embark

on dating and sexual activity or not, current policies do not appear to address the protective and transformative power of information. Including end users in the amendments and analysis of current policy may prove useful in improving relationships between foster parents, social workers and foster youth. Lastly, growing interest and understanding of sexual exploitation and human trafficking highlight specific vulnerability for foster youth and foster alumni, in the absence of this relevant and important information regarding dating and sexual behaviors.

Limitations

As a qualitative study the research presented here is not generalizable as it only pertained to the participants involved regarding their practices, attitudes and opinions. Because the study was limited to a very small area in Southern California and sampled participants in a small number of cities and communities, there is no way to generalize the information beyond the actual participants. Further the study did not include sexual minority participants, i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQQ), and as such does not provide information regarding this subpopulation of foster youth, alumni, child welfare social workers or foster parents for which this classification applies. Therefore, none of the data and related discussion is applicable to individuals that might identify as such.

Another limitation in this study is that the foster alumni interviewed in the study were asked to recall information from a time when they were at an earlier developmental stage. They are also being asked to tap into memories that may have faded or be inaccessible due to trauma which may have occurred during that time in their lives.

Another methodological issue is that foster alumni in Southern California while previously being in foster care there are different than current foster youth in other locations. The validity of this area of inquiry could be strengthened by repeat examinations of socialization practices with current foster youth in other geographical locations. Further, attention to methodological issues raised by Sellers, Wilson & Harris (2015) which raise consciousness around research aspects unique to vulnerable populations might improve depth of disclosures around sensitive inquiry.

Future Studies

Future studies with this data could review the data from male and female social workers to note any differences in responses for strategies to address the issue of sexual communication from the agency standpoint of what works for social workers in talking with foster parents and foster youth. Other studies that might be of interest using the current data would be to conduct and compare focus group data for all groups, as well as to include the perspective of additional participant groups, such as biological parents and public health nurses.

It might be helpful toward understand dating and socializations practices of foster youth compared to mainstream youth. Another idea is to conduct focus groups with mainstream youth to get their impressions around the effectiveness, timing and content of the discussions being held with them. A comparison of that qualitative data to the responses in the current dataset may also reveal interesting innovations and approaches in discussing dating and sexual behaviors in contemporary American society.

“Our most vulnerable communities and families, particularly those in the child welfare system, need the steadfast support of our policymakers to ensure that they have every opportunity to not only be safe but to truly thrive” (Tony Thurmond, Assembly Member, California Legislature, 2016).

Autoethnography

Eventually I took both of my children and went away to college. After a year at a big ten university, we couldn't stand the cold and moved to California so that I could finish my college education. Plans to finish school were thwarted over and over and six years after arriving in California, I obtained my bachelors. That took eight years from the date of the first college class until graduation. It only took 2 years to abandon the dream of attending medical school to enroll in a Master of Social Work program. My quest to help people that wouldn't be realized through medical school could certainly be fulfilled as a social worker.

The entire foster care episode, along with the social worker's name had been completely forgotten. After so many years in college, moving across the country, remarrying, completing 2 degrees, I did not remember that I had been in foster care until I was walking across the floor in my first child welfare position. I wanted to make sure that as a child welfare social worker I never forgot the children whose lives I supervised and I certainly hoped that they would remember me. I quickly promoted to supervisor and got to see that teen moms in foster care were losing custody of their children because of systemic issues (such as housing), not due to their parenting capabilities. I felt that this was unacceptable and from my vantage point I felt powerless to change the system.

As I sat across from foster alumni, social workers and foster parents for interviews, I was excited to have reached the point of my doctoral studies. I was not ready for the flood of emotion I would feel after each of my interviews. When I was with social workers, I could feel the commitment to the children and families and the sense of feeling helpless in many of the children's lives they shared as they recounted stories of places where they had offered as much support and counseling as they comfortably felt they could. As social workers we are trained to work with youth with sexual abuse issues and histories and while that isn't easy we do go in equipped to deal with sexual abuse. In this case, that helplessness, and feeling that 'I am doing the best I can, but I am definitely winging it' emotion was threaded throughout the interviews. They were my first interviews and the sense of continuing to push through, do what you have to do was very prevalent. I felt so confident that the workers would figure it out and work it out.

I disclosed to the social worker participants that I was also a social worker, I felt that disclosure solidified my position of solidarity, someone who understood their plight. It was intentioned with the power to ground the workers understanding to the interview's starting point. I felt a kindredness in the feelings of frustration they disclosed in their statements, hand gestures, expressions of helplessness. I had experienced this years earlier when I was compelled to return to school in pursuit of doctoral education to improve recruitment and retention of social workers. I know that they won't give up and they will persist until they resolve whatever issues are obstacles to them foster youth they serve.

When sitting with the foster alum participants, I did not disclose up front or with all of them that I shared that status of having once been in foster care. For all of them I

felt that it was best for the data to just disclose that I had been a social worker at the outset of the interview. After the interview, I felt compelled to share that I had also been in foster care and I felt at those times that what needed to be conveyed to calm the sense of frustration or anger that the foster alumni participant had displayed during or after the study. In hindsight it was probably more for me than for them. I found myself feeling very emotional after these interviews and most often a sense of pride, that despite all they had shared having gone through they were thriving and had a sense of purpose about their lives. The foster alumni were so insightful and knowledgeable regarding what their experiences had lacked or had added to their lives. I did not share that insight regarding my foster care experience and I believe that was partially due to the brief period of time I spent in foster care.

Having never been a foster parent, I did not have the same insider sense of what it was like to be a foster parent. What I shared with foster parents was what they conveyed when they reported feelings of being a parent to a foster child as I am a parent and was able to relate as to what a parent's responsibility entails. What I do have in my memory is the feeling I had the first time I met my foster parent and those things I remember that made me feel safe and looked after while in her home. Many foster parent encounters I have had as a social worker and supervisor have elicited the memory of being in my first foster home.

As a social worker I remember feeling the warmth present in many foster homes I visited. Even during the contacts with the foster parent associations I felt the instant sense of acceptance from the foster parents I encountered. My initial feelings for foster parents have only been reinforced by the interactions I have had with foster parents over the

years. When I left the foster parent interviews, it was like you were leaving from speaking with a family member. They were people who related to the tasks I had been assigned to as a social worker and although I was experiencing the transference of seeing them as the 'first' foster parent, they were seeing me as just another social worker, overworked and overburdened. It never occurred to me during these interviews to disclose my status as a foster alumni, although I wonder what the effect on the information I was collecting would have been. – Rhoda Smith

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APPENDIX A

CHILD WELFARE SOCIAL WORKER RECRUITMENT FLYER

From Policy to Practice

Child Welfare Social Worker Recruitment Flyer

ATTENTION SOCIAL WORKERS! WANT TO SHARE YOUR
OPINION ABOUT ISSUES CONCERNING FOSTER YOUTH,
DATING AND RELATIONSHIPS?

Want to tell someone what *you* think?

We need your opinion and your expertise!!

Your opinion is valuable!! In exchange for your opinion you will receive:

- A \$25 gift card from ONE of the following: The Habit, Waba Grill, Stater Bros Grocery Stores or Baker's Drive Thru
- A chance to give input on dating and relationships for foster youth

Do You:

- Currently have adolescents (age 14 and up) on your caseload?
- Have 2 years child welfare social work experience?

If you answered yes, and you want to participate in a research study, please

contact: R. Smith at 562-284-7543

BUSINESS CARDS WILL GO HERE

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Adventist Health Science Center
Institutional Review Board
Approved 6/14/2016
5160155 Chair

Shari Loney

APPENDIX B

FOSTER PARENT RECRUITMENT FLYER

FOSTER PARENTS / RELATIVE CAREGIVERS

WANT TO SHARE YOUR OPINIONS ABOUT WHAT FOSTER YOUTH,
DATING AND RELATIONSHIPS??

Want to tell someone what *you* think?

We need your opinion and your expertise!!

Your opinion is valuable!!

In exchange for your opinion you will receive:

- \$25 Gift Card from ONE of the following: The Habit, Waba Grill, Stater Bros
Grocery Stores or Baker's Drive Thru
- A chance to give input about a topic important to foster youth

Have you provided foster care to adolescents (age 14 and up)?

Have been a foster parent or a relative caregiver for at least 2 years?

If you answered yes you may be eligible to participate in a research study, please take a
card and contact us! If no cards, call R. Smith at 562-284-7543

Business Cards will go here

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Adventist Health Science Center
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Approved 6/14/2016
5160135 Chair

Shari Leary

APPENDIX C

FOSTER ALUMNI RECRUITMENT FLYER

ATTENTION

WERE YOU EVER IN FOSTER CARE?? IF SO WE WOULD LOVE YOUR
OPINION ON FOSTER YOUTH, DATING AND RELATIONSHIPS!

Tired of others speaking for you? Want to tell someone what *you* think? Your
participation in a research study is needed

For your participation you will receive:

- \$25 Gift Card from ONE of the following: The Habit, Waba Grill, Stater Bros
Grocery Stores or Baker's Drive Thru
- Opportunity to share your opinions on dating and relationships for foster youth

Did you:

- Live in foster care for at least 2 years after the age of 14?
- Exit from foster care within the past 5 years?

If you answered yes to both questions and you want to participate in the study, please take
a card and contact me to arrange for an interview. If no cards, contact R. Smith at 562-284-
7543

Your information is very valuable and your voice needs to be heard!

BUSINESS CARDS WILL GO HERE

Loma Linda University
Adventist Health Science Center
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Approved 6/14/2016
5160155 Chair

Shari Looney

APPENDIX D

PHONE SCRIPT FOR FOSTER ALUMNI MEETING

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

PHONE SCRIPT FOR FOSTER ALUMNI MEETING

PHONE SCRIPT FOR FOSTER ALUMNI MEETING

Hello, my name is Rhoda Smith and I am a doctoral candidate at Loma Linda University's Department of Social Work. I would like to tell you about my dissertation research study. Would it be convenient for me to talk to you about this study right now? The purpose of the study is to understand the behaviors, experiences and practices of child welfare social workers and foster parents in socializing foster youth to dating and sexual behaviors. I would like to come to your monthly meeting to briefly describe the study and to offer foster alumni an opportunity to participate in either a focus group or individual interviews. The introduction would take about 10 minutes to describe the study and approximately 10 minutes to address questions. If foster alumni meet the criteria for the study and are selected to participate, they would receive a \$25 gift card for their time and participation. Although they will not benefit directly, we hope that the results would provide some information that may facilitate discussions with social workers and foster parents about foster youth dating and sexual behaviors. Do you think that your foster alumni would be interested in participating in the study? Would you allow me to attend the meeting to discuss the study? Could you provide me

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Lorrie Looney

date, time and place of your next meeting? Do you have any questions?

Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX E

PHONE SCRIPT FOR FOSTER PARENT MEETING

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

PHONE SCRIPT FOR FOSTER PARENT MEETING

PHONE SCRIPT FOR FOSTER PARENT MEETING

Hello, my name is Rhoda Smith and I am a doctoral candidate at Loma Linda University's Department of Social Work. I would like to tell you about my dissertation research study. Would it be convenient for me to talk to you about this study right now? The purpose of the study is to understand the behaviors, experiences and practices of child welfare social workers, foster parents and foster alumni in socializing foster youth to dating and sexual behaviors. I would like to come to your monthly meeting to briefly describe the study and to offer other foster parents an opportunity to participate in either a focus group or individual interviews. The introduction would take about 10 minutes to describe the study and approximately 10 minutes to address questions. If foster parents meet the criteria for the study and are selected to participate, they would receive a \$25 gift card for their time and participation. Although they will not benefit directly, we hope that the results would provide some information that might facilitate discussions with social workers and foster parents about foster youth and dating and sexual behaviors. Do you think that your foster parents would be interested in participating in the study? Would you allow me to attend the meeting to discuss

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Shari Looney

the study? Could you provide me with the date, time and place of your next meeting? Do you have any questions?

Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX F

SOCIAL WORKER INFORMED CONSENT



LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY

School of Behavioral Health

Loma Linda University
Adventist Health Science Center
Institutional Review Board
Approved 6/14/16 Void after 6/12/2017
516055 Chair *Traci Looney*

SOCIAL WORKER INFORMED CONSENT

TITLE: From Policy to Practice: A Qualitative Examination of Socialization of Foster Youth to Dating and Sexual Behaviors: Perspectives of Child Welfare Social Workers, Foster Parents and Foster Alumni

SPONSOR: _____ N/A _____ (if applicable)

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Colwick Wilson, PhD

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of the study is to examine the attitudes, opinions and practices of child welfare social workers, foster alumni and foster parents around dating and sexual socialization of youth in foster care.

You are invited to be in this study because you are a child welfare social worker who has worked with teens on your caseload.

Approximately 35 subjects will participate in this study at about 8 study sites throughout southern California.

Your participation in this study may last up to 4 weeks, from initial contact until the completion of the focus group or individual interview.

HOW WILL I BE INVOLVED?

Participation in this study involves the following: Completing a short (9 item) demographic questionnaire and participating in a focus group with other social workers **OR** participating in an individual interview.

Completing the demographic questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Individual interviews will take approximately 60-90 minutes and will be audiotaped. Focus groups will take approximately 90-120 minutes and will be audiotaped.

You may elect to participate in a focus group with other social workers **OR** an individual interview, but not both.

You may be asked questions such as “What kind of dating information do you provide to foster youth on your caseload?” and/or “If you provided information to a caregiver regarding dating and sexual behavior for youth in foster care what did you say?”

WHAT ARE THE REASONABLY FORESEEABLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS I MIGHT HAVE?

This study poses no greater risk to you than what you routinely encounter in day-to-day life. Participating in this study will involve the following risks: possible breach of confidentiality, recalling an unpleasant or previously forgotten event connected to a child welfare case.

All records and research materials that identify you will be held confidential. Any published document resulting from this study will not disclose your identity without your permission. Information identifying you will only be available to the study personnel.

All documents and transcripts will not bear your name and will be de-identified. Audio tapes and any other documents you complete will be kept in a locked file cabinet and will only bear coded information. Your name will not be placed on any documents.

You will be provided with information for follow up counseling, if you deem it necessary from Catholic Charities, Moreno Valley, Ca; Catholic Charities, San Bernardino, Ca; Family Services Association, Riverside, Ca and Family Services Association, San Bernardino, Ca.

WILL THERE BE ANY BENEFIT TO ME OR OTHERS?

Although you may not personally benefit from this study, your participation may help practitioners identify ways to help foster youth feel comfortable to discuss dating and sexual behaviors with caregivers.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A SUBJECT?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw once the study has started. You may refuse to answer a specific question or questions. Your decision whether or not to participate or terminate at any time will not affect your job or standing with the researchers, current or former foster parents, social workers, or the agency. You do not give up any legal rights by participating in this study.

WHAT COSTS ARE INVOLVED?

There is no cost to you for participating in this study.

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1160155 Chair *Lorei Loay**

WILL I BE PAID TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY?

You will receive a \$25 gift card for participating in the study, from one of the following vendors: The Habit, State Bros. Grocery Stores, Waba Grill, Baker's Drive Thru

WHO DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Call 909-558-4647 or e-mail patientrelations@llu.edu for information and assistance with complaints or concerns about your rights in this study.

SUBJECT'S STATEMENT OF CONSENT

- I have read the contents of the consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by the investigator.
- Signing this consent document does not waive my rights nor does it release the investigators, institution or sponsors from their responsibilities.
- I may call Rhoda Smith, MSW during routine office hours at (562) 284-7543 or during non-office hours if I have additional questions or concerns.
- I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study.

I understand I will be given a copy of this consent form after signing it.

Signature of Subject

Printed Name of Subject

Date

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I have reviewed the contents of this consent form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study.

Signature of Investigator

Rhoda Smith

Printed Name of Investigator

Date

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Adventist Health Science Center
Institutional Review Board
Approved 6/14/16 Void after 6/12/2017
#5160155 Chair *Travis Looney**

APPENDIX G

FOSTER PARENT INFORMED CONSENT



LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY

School of Behavioral Health

Loma Linda University
Adventist Health Science Center
Institutional Review Board
Approved 6/14/16 Void after 6/12/2017
516055 Chair Shari Looney

SUBSTITUTE CAREGIVER INFORMED CONSENT

TITLE: From Policy to Practice: A Qualitative Examination of Socialization of Foster Youth to Dating and Sexual Behaviors: Perspectives of Child Welfare Social Workers, Foster Parents and Foster Alumni

SPONSOR: _____ N/A _____ (if applicable)

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Colwick Wilson, PhD

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of the study is to examine the behaviors, perceptions and experiences of child welfare social workers and foster parents around dating and sexual socialization of youth in foster care.

You are invited to be in this study because you are a substitute caregiver or foster parent who has provided a home to adolescent youth who were in foster care and placed with you by the court.

Approximately 35 subjects will participate in this study at approximately 8 study sites throughout southern California.

Your participation in this study may last up to 4 weeks, from initial contact until the completion of the focus groups or individual interviews.

HOW WILL I BE INVOLVED?

Participation in this study involves the following: Completing a short (14 item) demographic questionnaire and participating in a focus group with other foster parents **OR** participating in an individual interview.

Completing the demographic questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Individual interviews will take approximately 60-90 minutes and will be audiotaped. Focus groups will take approximately 90-120 minutes and will be audiotaped.

You may elect to participate in a focus group with other foster parents **OR** an individual interview, but not both.

You may be asked questions such as, "On a scale of 0 – 10, with 0 indicating completely uncomfortable and 10 being completely comfortable, how comfortable are you with providing information to foster youth about dating?" and/or "If you provide information to a foster youth regarding dating behavior, what do you say?"

WHAT ARE THE REASONABLY FORESEEABLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS I MIGHT HAVE?

This study poses no greater risk to you than what you routinely encounter in day-to-day life. Participating in this study will involve the following risks: possible breach of confidentiality, recalling an unpleasant or previously forgotten event connected to a time when you may have had a youth placed in your home.

All records and research materials that identify you will be held confidential. Any published document resulting from this study will not disclose your identity without your permission. Information identifying you will only be available to the study personnel.

All documents and transcripts will not bear your name and will be de-identified. Audio tapes and other documents you complete will be kept in a locked file cabinet and will only bear coded information. Your name will not be placed on any documents.

You will be provided with information for follow-up counseling, if you deem it necessary for Catholic Charities, Moreno Valley, Ca; Catholic Charities, San Bernardino, Ca; Family Services Association, Riverside, Ca; and Family Services Association, San Bernardino, Ca

WILL THERE BE ANY BENEFIT TO ME OR OTHERS?

Although you may not personally benefit from this study, your participation may help practitioners identify ways to help foster youth feel comfortable to discuss dating and sexual information and behaviors with caregivers and social workers.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A SUBJECT?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw once the study has started. You may refuse to answer a specific question or questions. Your decision whether or not to participate or terminate at any time will not affect your job as a foster parent, standing with the researchers, social workers, or the agency. You do not give up any legal rights by participating in this study.

WHAT COSTS ARE INVOLVED?

There is no cost to you for participating in this study.

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Adventist Health Science Center
Institutional Review Board
Approved 6/14/16 Void after 6/12/2017
#5160155 Chair *Lami Loay**

WILL I BE PAID TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY?

You will receive a \$25 gift card for participating in the study, from one of the following vendors: The Habit, State Bros. Grocery Stores, Waba Grill, or Baker's Drive Thru

WHO DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Call 909-558-4647 or e-mail patientrelations@llu.edu for information and assistance with complaints or concerns about your rights in this study.

SUBJECT'S STATEMENT OF CONSENT

- I have read the contents of the consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by the investigator.
- Signing this consent document does not waive my rights nor does it release the investigators, institution or sponsors from their responsibilities.
- I may call Rhoda Smith, MSW during routine office hours at (562) 284-7543 or during non-office hours if I have additional questions or concerns.
- I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study.

I understand I will be given a copy of this consent form after signing it.

Signature of Subject

Printed Name of Subject

Date

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I have reviewed the contents of this consent form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study.

Signature of Investigator

Rhoda Smith, MSW

Printed Name of Investigator

Date

Loma Linda University
Adventist Health Science Center
Institutional Review Board
Approved 6/14/16 Void after 6/12/2017
576065 Chair Lorri Lozuy

APPENDIX H

FOSTER ALUMNI INFORMED CONSENT



LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY

School of Behavioral Health

Loma Linda University
Adventist Health Science Center
Institutional Review Board
Approved 6/14/16 Void after 6/12/2017
5160155 Chair *Shari Leary*

FOSTER ALUMNI INFORMED CONSENT

TITLE: From Policy to Practice: A Qualitative Examination of Socialization of Foster Youth to Dating and Sexual Behaviors: Perspectives of Child Welfare Social Workers, Foster Parents and Foster Alumni

SPONSOR: N/A (if applicable)

PRINCIPAL

INVESTIGATOR: Colwick Wilson, PhD

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of the study is to examine the behaviors, perceptions and experiences of child welfare social workers, foster alumni and foster parents around dating and sexual socialization of youth in foster care.

You are invited to be in this study because you are a Foster Alumni or person who has identified as someone who was previously in foster care.

Approximately 35 subjects will participate in this study at about 8 study sites throughout southern California.

Your participation in this study may last up to 4 weeks from the initial meeting until the completion of the focus group or individual interview.

HOW WILL I BE INVOLVED?

Participation in this study involves the following: Completing a short (16 item) demographic questionnaire and participating in a focus group with other foster alumni **OR** participating in an individual interview.

Completing the demographic questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Individual interviews will take approximately 60-90 minutes and will be audiotaped. Focus groups will take approximately 90-120 minutes and will be audiotaped.

You may elect to participate in a focus group with other foster alumni **OR** an individual interview, but not both.

You may be asked questions such as, "While in foster care did you receive information about dating? If yes, can you tell me more about where you received the information?" and "If you received information from a social worker, what did they give you or what did they say?"

WHAT ARE THE REASONABLY FORESEEABLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS I MIGHT HAVE?

This study poses no greater risk to you than what you routinely encounter in day-to-day life. Participating in this study will involve the following risks: possible breach of confidentiality, recalling an unpleasant or previously forgotten event connected to being in foster care.

All records and research materials that identify you will be held confidential. Any published document resulting from this study will not disclose your identity without your permission. Information identifying you will only be available to the study personnel.

All documents and transcripts will not bear your name and will be de-identified. Audio tapes and other documents you complete will be kept in a locked file cabinet and will only bear coded information. Your name will not be placed on any documents.

You will be provided with information for follow-up counseling, if you deem it necessary from Catholic Charities, Moreno Valley, Ca; Catholic Charities, San Bernardino, Ca; Family Services Association, Riverside, Ca; and Family Services Association, San Bernardino, Ca.

WILL THERE BE ANY BENEFIT TO ME OR OTHERS?

Although you may not personally benefit from this study, your participation may help practitioners identify ways to help foster youth feel comfortable to discuss dating and sexual information and behaviors with caregivers and social workers.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A SUBJECT?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw once the study has started. You may refuse to answer a specific question or questions. Your decision whether or not to participate or terminate at any time will not affect your standing with the researchers, former foster parents, social workers, or the agency. You do not give up any legal rights by participating in this study.

WHAT COSTS ARE INVOLVED?

There is no cost to you for participating in this study.

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WILL I BE PAID TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY?

You will receive a \$25 gift card for participating in the study, from one of the following vendors: The Habit, Stater Bros. Grocery Stores, Waba Grill, or Baker's Drive Thru.

WHO DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Call 909-558-4647 or e-mail patientrelations@llu.edu for information and assistance with complaints or concerns about your rights in this study.

SUBJECT'S STATEMENT OF CONSENT

- I have read the contents of the consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by the investigator.
- Signing this consent document does not waive my rights nor does it release the investigators, institution or sponsors from their responsibilities.
- I may call Rhoda Smith, MSW during routine office hours at (562) 284-7543 or during non-office hours if I have additional questions or concerns.
- I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study.

I understand I will be given a copy of this consent form after signing it.

Signature of Subject

Printed Name of Subject

Date

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I have reviewed the contents of this consent form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study.

Signature of Investigator

Rhoda Smith, MSW

Printed Name of Investigator

Date

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APPENDIX I

SOCIAL WORKER SIGN IN FORM

PLEASE SELECT A COLOR CARD FROM THE TABLE AND SIGN IN USING THE NAME OF THE COLOR AS THE NAME

Foster Youth Dating Study Focus Group Sign-In Sheet – Social Workers				
COLOR Name	Agency or County Name	Email Address	Telephone Contact	Gift Card Receipt Signature
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

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 # 5160153 Chair *Lami Leamy*

APPENDIX J

FOSTER PARENT SIGN IN FORM

PLEASE SELECT A COLORED CARD FROM THE TABLE AND SIGN IN USING THE NAME OF THE COLOR

Foster Youth Dating Study Focus Group Sign-In Sheet - Foster Parents				
Color	Agency or County Name	Email Address	Telephone Contact	Gift Card receipt Signature
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

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#516055 Chair

Linda Looney

APPENDIX K

FOSTER ALUMNI SIGN IN FORM

PLEASE SELECT A COLORED CARD FROM THE TABLE AND USE THE NAME OF THE COLOR TO SIGN IN

Foster Youth Dating Study Focus Group Sign-In Sheet - Foster Alumni					
Name	County Affiliation	Email Address	Telephone Contact	Gift card signature receipt	
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					

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 # 5160153 Chair *Loni Looney*

APPENDIX L

SOCIAL WORKER DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

From Policy to Practice Children Social Workers Demographic Questionnaire

1. Official job title _____
2. Level of education (please circle highest level completed)
 - a. High school grad b. Some college c. College grad? Major _____
 - d. Post graduate courses _____ e. Grad degree? Major _____
3. Did you complete an internship with San Bernardino County CFS? **Circle One.**
Yes _____ No _____
4. Race/ethnic group(s) you most closely identify with. **Select all that apply:**
 - a. White b. Hispanic c. Black d. Asian e. Pacific Islander
 - f. Native American g. Other (please specify) _____
5. Date of Birth: Month _____ Year _____
6. Gender: **Circle one.** Male Female Declined to state
7. Length of time employed as a Children's social worker: **Circle one.**
 - a. 0 – 2 yrs b. 3 – 5 yrs c. 6 – 10 yrs d. 11 yrs + _____
8. Currently what percentage of youth on your caseload are 14 years or older?

9. Who do you believe should counsel/discuss issues regarding dating and sexuality with youth? **Circle all that apply:** a. Social workers b. Foster parents
c. Public health nurses d. Biological family e. Peers f. Other _____
10. On a scale of 0-10 how comfortable are you having reproductive / sexual health conversations with youth?

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From Policy to Practice Children Social Workers Demographic Questionnaire

Other Comments/Concerns

Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX M

FOSTER PARENT DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

From Policy to Practice Foster Parent Demographic Questionnaire

1. Are you a (Circle One): Foster Parent Kin Parent Relative Caregiver
2. Date of Birth: Month _____ Year _____
3. Race/ethnic group(s) you most closely identify with. **Select all that apply:**
 - a. White b. Hispanic c. Black d. Asian e. Pacific Islander
 - f. Native American g. Other (please specify) _____
4. Level of education (please circle highest level completed)
 - a. High school grad b. Some college c. College grad? Major _____
 - d. Post graduate courses _____ e. Grad degree? Major _____
5. Gender: Circle one: Male Female Declined to state

Foster Care Experience

6. How many years have you provided foster care? _____
7. Has it all been in the current county/agency? Yes No
If no, please tell us about other counties or agencies where you have provided foster care
(How many other counties or agencies?) _____
8. When you began providing foster care what age-range child did you request to have placed with you? If no age range was requested, state none _____
9. What is the age range of children you have provided foster care for? (ie babies, teens, middle school) _____

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Shirley L. Loney

From Policy to Practice Foster Parent Demographic Questionnaire

10. List the sex / age of all the children currently placed with you. **Example: F – 3, M – 10** _____

11. Longest length of time you have had a child placed in your home _____

12. Overall, how many children would you say you have fostered? _____

13. Do you have any biological or adopted children? **Please circle one** Yes No

If yes, please indicate number, age and sex of: a. Biological _____ and/or b. Adopted _____

14. Who do you believe should counsel/discuss issues with youth regarding dating and sexuality? **Circle all that apply:** a. Social workers b. Foster parents

c. Public health nurses d. Biological family e. Peers f. Other _____

Other Comments/Concerns:

Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX N

FOSTER ALUMNI DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

From Policy to Practice Foster Care Alumni Demographic Questionnaire

1. Date of Birth: Month _____ Year _____
2. Gender: **Circle One** Male Female Declined to state
3. Marital Status: **Circle One:** Single Married Declined to state
4. Race/ethnic group(s) you most closely identify with. **Select all that apply:**
a. White b. Hispanic c. Black d. Asian e. Pacific Islander
f. Native American g. Other (please specify) _____
5. **Employment Status:** **Circle all that apply** a. Employed Full-time
b. Employed Part-time c. Self – Employed d. Unemployed
If employed, please state current occupation, business or job title _____
- d. Full-time student e. Part-time student If you are a student, please indicate major and career goal _____
6. Level of education (please circle highest level completed)
a. High school grad b. Some college c. College grad? Major _____
d. Post graduate courses _____ e. Grad degree? Major _____

Foster Care Experience

7. How many years were you in foster care? _____
8. How old you were when you were removed from your home?

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From Policy to Practice Foster Care Alumni Demographic Questionnaire

9. Did you have multiple entries into foster care? If yes, number of times entered _____

10. How long have you been out of foster care? _____

11. Did you emancipate from foster care? Yes No

If not, who did you live with when you turned 18? _____

12. How many foster parents or placements do you remember? _____

13. How long did you live in your last foster placement? _____

14. Length of longest placement _____

15. Do you have children? Yes No Decline to state

If yes, number and age of child(ren) _____

16. Who do you believe should counsel / discuss issues of dating and sexuality with foster youth? **Circle all that apply.** a. Social workers b. Foster parents
c. Public health nurses d. Biological family e. Peers f. Other (please specify) _____

Other Comments / Concerns:

Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX O

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SOCIAL WORKER INTERVIEWS

From Policy to Practice

Discussion Guide for Social Worker Interviews

Ice breaker: Introduction and Smalltalk about what the person likes as a favorite activity

1. What kind of dating information do you provide to foster youth on your caseload?
2. If you received information or training regarding dating or sexual communication for foster youth what was it?
3. If you provided information to a caregiver regarding dating and sexual behavior for youth in foster care what did you say?
4. If you provided information to foster youth regarding dating and sexual behavior what did you say?
5. Where do you feel that foster youth receive information regarding dating and sexual behavior?
6. Who do you feel / believe is the best person to provide dating and information about sexual behavior to foster youth? Why do you feel this is the best resource?
7. How comfortable are you with discussing issues around dating and sexual behaviors with foster youth? With foster parents?

The next 2 questions are tentative

8. What do you think sexual socialization means? What kind of behaviors do you think fall under normative sexual behaviors?
9. Do you consider discussions regarding sexual behaviors, dating and reproductive health referrals as part of your job?
10. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me that you feel would be important for me to know?

Exit question: What would you change if you could do it yourself looking back?

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APPENDIX P

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR FOSTER PARENT INTERVIEWS

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR FOSTER PARENT INTERVIEWS

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR FOSTER/RELATIVE PARENTS

1. On a scale of 0 – 10, with 0 indicating completely uncomfortable and 10 being completely comfortable, how comfortable are you with providing information to foster youth about dating?
2. What kind of information about dating do you provide to foster youth placed in your home?
3. On a scale of 0 – 10, with 0 indicating completely incompetent and 10 indicating completely competent, how competent do you currently feel in your ability to provide information to foster youth about dating and sexual behavior?
4. When you provide information to foster youth, is it written or does it just occur in conversation?
5. If you provide information to a foster youth regarding dating behavior, what do you say?
6. If you received information from a social worker regarding information on dating behavior what was it?
7. Where do you feel foster youth receive the most information while in foster care regarding dating and sexual behavior? Prompt...(home, school, movies, social workers, therapists)
8. Who do you feel would be the best resource to socialize youth to normative dating behavior? Pump....why do you feel this way?
9. What are your expectations around dating and foster youth placed in your home?
10. Do you have any other information or suggestions regarding the issue of dating for foster youth that you would like for us to know?
11. **Exit question:** What would you change if you could do it yourself looking back?

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Frank Looney

APPENDIX Q

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR FOSTER ALUMNI INTERVIEWS

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR FOSTER CARE ALUMNI

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR FOSTER CARE ALUMNI

1. While in foster care did you receive information about dating? If yes, can you tell me more about where you received the information?
2. What kind of information about dating did you receive while in foster care? Prompts...rules, permission, curfews etc?
3. If you received information from a caregiver what kind of information did you receive? Prompts.... Written, video, verbal, none or all.....What did they give you or what did they say?
4. Were you comfortable receiving this information from..... (Where ever they state)
5. If you received information from a social worker, what did they give you or what did they say?
6. Where do you feel / believe that you have received the most information while in foster care regarding dating? Prompts. home, school, movies, social worker, therapists
7. What kind of sexual education materials were provided to you while in foster care? Prompts...Lectures, films, books etc.
8. Do you feel / believe this was the best person to provide this information? If yes, can you say why you think so? If not, why do you feel this way and who do you feel/believe would have been better and why?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us that you feel would be important for us to know?
10. **Exit question:** What would you change if you could do it yourself looking back?

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APPENDIX R

LOW AND NO COST COUNSELING AGENCIES

From Policy to Practice

List of Counseling Agencies

List of Counseling Agencies in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties

The following local counseling agencies provide free counseling services or provide counseling based on ability to pay

Catholic Charities
23623 Sunnymead Blvd, Suite E
Moreno Valley, Ca
951-788-5020

Catholic Charities of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties
1450 North 'D' Street
San Bernardino, Ca 92405
909-388-1239

Family Services Association
472 N. Arrowhead Avenue
San Bernardino, Ca 92401
909-288-2100

Family Services Association
3865 Riverview Drive
Riverside, Ca 92506
951-369-8036

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APPENDIX S

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Rhoda Smith and I am currently a doctoral candidate at Loma Linda University in Social Policy and Social Work. My dissertation research will examine policies and practices associated with socialization of foster youth to normative dating and sexual behaviors. I am interested in learning how foster youth in out-of-home care learn about normative behaviors, such as dating. This question might feel sensitive to you in terms of the subject matter, but is an important one given the current statistics of related outcomes (pregnancy, educational disruption, STD, HIV/AIDS) which negatively impact the lives of foster youth.

I am conducting a mixed methods study, utilizing face-to-face interviews with social workers, foster and kin parents and adults who were formerly in foster care (foster care alumni). In addition I will also hold focus groups with representatives from each of these groups. I am writing to solicit your county's interest in participating in this important study. I would like to be granted permission to recruit these participants through your county field offices and conduct the interviews during their lunch hour. In exchange for their time and participation, I would provide lunch on the premises.

The current study maximizes privacy and confidentiality and in no way delves into any social worker, clients, or foster/kin/relative personal backgrounds nor does it compromise or inquire about specific client information. As a former child protective services supervisor I am sensitive to County mandates concerning private and confidential information. I would love to meet with you to further discuss the possibility of working with your agency on this study. If this study is of interest to you, please contact me via telephone (951) 515-8206 or email rlsbarrett49@gmail.com or my dissertation chair, Dr. Colwick Wilson, cwilson@llu.edu to arrange for a meeting to further discuss this research project.

Thank you,

Rhoda Smith, MSW

APPENDIX T

PRELIMINARY BUDGET

Travel (Mileage and Gas)	\$ 360
Disposable cell phone - 8 months @ \$15	\$120
Flyers	\$ 25
Postage	\$125
Printing/Duplicating	\$150
Meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner, coffee)	\$200
Honorariums for participating	
Gift cards for social workers 12 @ \$5.00	\$ 60
Gift cards for focus groups (2) for 13 social workers	\$ 65
Gift cards for foster alumni 10 @ \$25.00	\$250
Gift cards for foster parents 7 @ \$25.00	\$175
Transcription	\$1200
NVivo Software	\$225
Pilot sessions (site fee, refreshments)	\$200
Total Preliminary Budget	\$3125

APPENDIX U

RULES FOR FOCUS GROUP

1. SHOW RESPECT FOR OTHERS
2. ALL OPINIONS ARE VALUABLE
3. WAIT YOUR TURN TO TALK
4. WHATEVER IS DISCLOSED IN THE GROUP, STAYS IN THE GROUP
5. THERE ARE NO STUPID QUESTIONS
6. AGREE TO DISAGREE

APPENDIX V

SAMPLE OF DONOR SOLICITATION LETTER

To Whom It May Concern

My name is Rhoda Smith and I am currently a doctoral candidate at Loma Linda University in Social Policy and Social Work. My dissertation research will examine policies and practices associated with socialization of foster youth to normative dating behaviors. In essence, I am interested in learning how foster youth in out-of-home care are socialized to normative developmental behaviors, such as dating. This question is sensitive in terms of the subject matter, but necessary given the current statistics of related outcomes (pregnancy, educational disruption, STD, HIV/AIDS) which negatively impact the lives of foster youth.

The study I am proposing is a qualitative and exploratory one, utilizing in-depth interviews with social workers, foster parents and adults who were formerly in foster care (foster care alumni). I am writing to request donations from your organization to provide to the participants in the study. As county social workers cannot take time from their workday to participate in the study, I would like to provide lunch on the premises for them. Because of the participants not receiving any financial remuneration to participate and provide information about this important topic which may prove useful and informative to service provisions to foster youth, any donation of gift cards would be appreciated. I anticipate a final sample of approximately 30 participants. If this study is of interest to you or if you would like to discuss the project further, please contact me via telephone (951) 515-8206 or email rlsbarrett49@gmail.com. Thank you for your consideration in helping to assist in this research project.

APPENDIX W

LIST OF PARTICIPANT INCENTIVES RECEIVED

Donations Received

The Habit	3- \$25.00 Gift Cards including store locations list
Baker's Drive – Thru	4- \$25.00 Gift Cards
Stater Bros. Grocery Stores	1- \$25.00 Gift Card
Waba Grill	15-\$10.00 Gift Cards

APPENDIX X

SAMPLE REFLEXIVITY NOTE

And so this was a really wonderful interview. The foster mom -- Really great interview, foster mom was under the weather, and she still agreed to do the interview. Could not get away from taking care of the kids, and so there's yelling in the background, Hopefully transcribers don't want to kill me. She took the time to show me all the pictures of all the kids that she had fostered, and their stories. She told me about a time when she started, how she started fostering, was a little girl she found in the park. And from that point forward, she brought her home and the rest, as they say, is history. But watching her interact with the kids, you really can just see the love that she has for them, and the care, and the concern. You can see that she is invested in the kids. She is invested in their success, she's really committed to ensuring that they grow up well. And so, just, an excellent interview. The interview lasted approximately one hour and forty-five minutes from start to finish, although the audio tape portion isn't that long, so... This is the first foster parent interview that I was able to get this week. It should have been the fourth, and this one was definitely well worth the time and investment that it took me to get foster mom to commit to the interview, so I'm very grateful.